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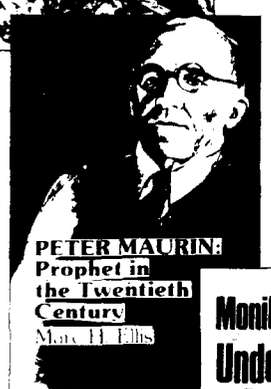

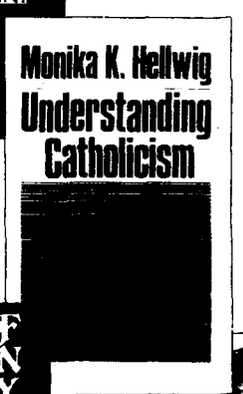

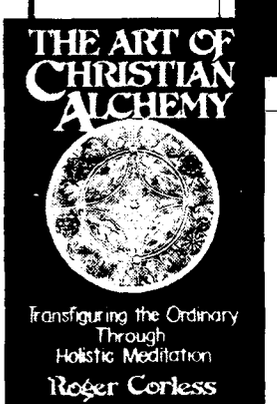

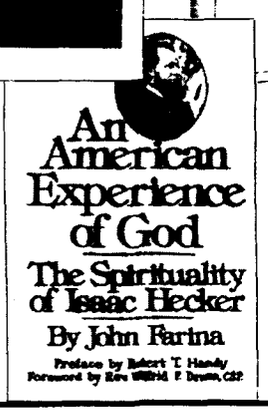

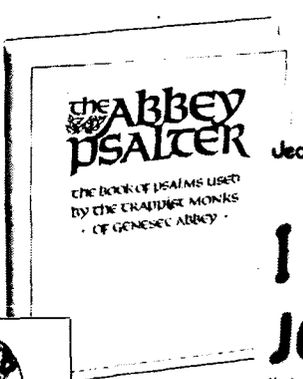

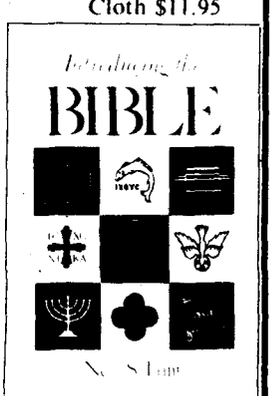

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Correspondence

The reviewer sins

Chicago, Ill.

To the Editors: Long, long ago I gave up expecting either accuracy or fairness for me or my work in the pages of *Commonweal*. Nonetheless, Maurice Berube's distortion in the first two paragraphs of his review, "Two These on Ethnicity," were so false, so ignorant and so malicious that I have no choice but to respond to the [Aug. 28].

First of all, the "ethnic miracle" of which I wrote has nothing to do with the argument that "certain ethnic groups were able to succeed because of superior cultural values." Quite the contrary, the "ethnic miracle" is that those who were supposed to have inferior cultural values—the Poles and the Italians—have succeeded (and for the inferiority of their values, see the work of such giants of the Chicago School as W. I. Thomas, Florian Znaniecki, and Robert E. Park). Professor Berube thus attributes to me a definition of the ethnic miracle as exactly the opposite of which I wrote. Moreover, whatever a "neoconservative" is, I am not a neoconservative, as Professor Berube argues in his second paragraph. His linking of my name with that of the turncoat, Michael Novak, is gratuitous and false. I am not a "former liberal," much less a "former leftist." I am rather an Irish Catholic Democrat from Chicago and have been so since I was fourteen.

Moreover, I do not think—as Thomas Sowell apparently does think—that blacks are just like any other "ethnic group." Indeed, my friend and colleague from the University of Arizona, Stanley Lieberson, in his monumental and ingenious work, *A Piece of the Pie*, demonstrates, to my mind conclusively, what is the similarity and what is the difference between the blacks and the ethnic immigrants of the early twentieth century. It is a monument to Professor Berube's incompetence that he does not even seem to be aware of Lieberson's book, and it is a monument to the *Commonweal*'s ongoing failure as a serious intellectual journal that it will commission reviews of shallow, inept, and misleading books such as those by Sowell and Stephen Steinberg, and ignore Stanley Lieberson.

But then what else is new?

(REV.) ANDREW M. GREELEY

The author replies:

Virginia Beach, Va.

I am delighted to learn that Father Greeley may be experiencing a change of heart. His denunciation of Michael Novak and Thomas Sowell is good to hear. Does that mean that I will now be reading Father Greeley in the pages of the more liberal *New York Review of Books* or *Commonweal* rather than where I have been reading him, in those twin organs of neoconservatism, *The Public Interest* and *Commentary*?

There are Democrats and there are Democrats. Here in the South Democrats are, by and large, indistinguishable from conservative Republicans. Had Father Greeley read Peter Steinfels's *The Neoconservatives* he may have learned that neoconservatives are found in both parties, as New York's Democratic Senator Daniel Moynihan shows. Greeley's ranting and raving against radicals, militant feminists, and black leaders (in *Ethnicity in the United States* among other places) places him in my book, closer to Moynihan than it does to Vernon Jordan.

As for his views on ethnicity, Greeley makes quite clear in his article, "The Ethnic Miracle," in *The Public Interest*, that cultural values are dominant. Why did immigrant groups at the turn of the century succeed? "Hard work, saving, sacrifice,' Greeley writes, "such is the tentative explanation of the 'ethnic miracle'." That success was without benefit, he notes, of "quotas, no affirmative action, no elaborate system of social service, and heaven knows, no ethnic militancy. . . ." Although he says that it doesn't follow that today government aid may not be necessary, his heart isn't in it. The implication is why can't others do the same.

Finally, I must say that I have long been perturbed by Father Greeley's apologist attitudinal surveys that purport to show that white ethnics are in favor of integration. The historical evidence such as the Poles resisting housing integration in Chicago, the Irish fighting school busing in Roxbury, and the Jews opposing a low-income project for blacks in Forest Hills often suggests otherwise. As the black rights activists said in the late sixties, if you are not part of the solution you are part of the problem; Father Greeley is part of the problem.

Perhaps he may do more good in his new role as a hack novelist than he has as a social scientist.

MAURICE R. BERUBE

Union blues

Lancaster, Pa.

To the Editors: The editorials in the Sept. 11 issue of *Commonweal* perfectly illustrate my resubscription dilemma. I found the editorial concerning ABC-TV's attempt to report the subtleties of monasticism to be filled with the type of insight and erudition that more than justify the subscription price. The editorial on organized labor, however, reflected the blind dogmatism and disregard for facts that characterize *Commonweal*'s views of unionism. Allow me to outline my view of organized labor:

1) Unions represent a powerful (although perhaps not as powerful as in the past) well-paid elite that is primarily concerned with the desires of its own membership.

This statement is supported by the fact that only 20 percent of the American work force is unionized. Inevitably, if

(Continued on page 637)

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BITING THE MIDEAST BULLET

THE ASSASSINATION of President Anwar el-Sadat of Egypt underscored the uncertainties of U.S. policy in the Middle East—uncertainties that will not be cured by escalating the arms race in the region. At the close of Menachem Begin's visit to this country, it was announced that the U.S. and Israel were planning to embark on a course of "strategic collaboration" even closer than the relationship that already existed between the two countries. On the U.S. side, the move was apparently an effort to get Israel to ease its opposition to the sale of AWACS to Saudi Arabia. If that was the case, the effort failed. And what exactly did the United States get in return for its side of the bargain, with all the damage it is bound to do to our relations with the Arab countries? Precious little, except to bolster the administration's paper consensus in the area against Soviet encroachment. As in the days of Henry Kissinger, the Reagan administration seems committed to the idea that ever more and more must be done to foster Israel's sense of security in order to make that country eventually more ready to make needed compromises with the Palestinians and its Arab neighbors. Clearly the policy has not worked and is not working. But in the meantime the administration strategy seems to be to avoid any discussion of real or possible conflicts of national interest between the United States and Israel. Take the sensitive—to the U.S.—question of the Israeli use of American arms to destroy Iraq's nuclear reactor. It was reported that this topic, much discussed in the U.S., was not even mentioned at the recent Reagan-Begin summit. Ditto about the use of U.S. planes in the killing of hundreds of Lebanese civilians in Beirut. Ditto for the increasingly obvious policy of annexation Mr. Begin is pursuing on the West Bank where the overwhelming majority of the population is made up of Palestinian Arabs. These points represent serious differences between the United States and Israel, and it is folly to continue to ignore them lest we upset Israel's sense of security.

The fact is that in such matters Israel is not following a course that is in our national interest. Indeed, from a long-range point of view the course is not even in Israel's national interest. It is time for the U.S. to make both of these points, forcibly. Memories of the Holocaust should not be allowed to keep America silent about policies that are misguided at best and potentially fatal at worst. Nor does this nation's basic commitment to Israel's continued health and survival mean that we should endorse everything that Menachem Begin does. In the long run and possibly even in the short run, the future of Israel is dependent on some sort of accommodation with the Palestinians and its Arab neighbors. This will not be easily done, and pressure will have to be put on them too, but the U.S. should insist that a beginning must be made. The Israeli-Egyptian autonomy talks in which the U.S. will participate is one place to start. Mr. Begin's frozen posture on this and other similar questions makes progress toward a peaceful settlement impossible. On top of this, his willingness to use air strikes here, there, and everywhere outside his borders,

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using United States planes in the process, endangers not only Israel's long-range security interests but those of this country. The outgoing U.S. Ambassador to Syria recently characterized Prime Minister Begin as blind and said that no peace settlement in the Middle East could be reached while he remained in office. It is time for the United States to put that assertion to the test.

GAPS & LINKS

When the rich man speaks all are silent,
and they extol to the clouds what he has to say.
When the poor man speaks they say, "Who is this fellow?"
Sirach (13:23)

So far as U.S. foreign policy is concerned, the Cancún summit promised to pour some salubrious sunlight on the Reagan-Haig obsession to impose a Cold-War frame upon third-world development issues. Up until this point, the Reagan administration's attitude toward the third and fourth worlds, reaffirmed by the president's October 13 speech in Philadelphia, has largely replayed the parable of Dives and Lazarus—with a twist. In effect, the Philadelphia speech told the poor to follow the newly Gilderized gospel of American free enterprise; told Tanzania's Julius K. Nyerere, Bangladesh's Abdus Sattar, or Guyana's Forbes Burnham, to go out and hire themselves a New World rich in natural resources, vast space, and hordes of exploitable skilled immigrants. Little wonder, then, that these gentlemen were unmoved to relocate. The greater wonder is that after having received such a sloganeering, ideological advance notice from the U.S. president, the conferees, doubtless swallowing hard, apparently maintained their cool, their tact, and—though it was difficult to tell from an American press that largely blanked out what others said and fluttered around Reagan like moths about a flame—their candor.

The air cleared, we're told. And out of that thin air, the summit co-hosts, Canadian Premier Pierre Elliott Trudeau and Mexican President Jose López Portillo, conjured agreement to pursue development negotiations at the U.N. Neither a date nor the terms of the new talks were set, and the consensus on making the U.N. (one state-one vote) their site was hedged with the U.S. demurrer: as forums, the administration prefers the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), where the big contributing industrial world holds hegemony and veto power. Though Reagan's willingness to commit the U.S. to participate in such negotiations—which at the very least involve the third world's claim for structural reform in the international economic order—may represent real movement on his part, Cancún has done no more, and no less, than bring us back to the deadlock of last year's U.N. Special Session on Development which broke up unable to agree on the terms of the debate. Acutely aware of this history, Mr. Trudeau said of Cancún, "This was not a *solid* step forward."

For the future, then, much depends on the undefined "spirit" that Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, and Helmut Schmidt may have caught at Cancún, the possibility that in closed rooms at least, they were able to hear, and be heard by, leaders of the third world.

The argument, of course, is about gaps and linkages—but not the essentially military or East-West ones Mr. Reagan has had uppermost in mind. The gap is the widening one between rich and poor that poses—with or without Russian or Cuban help—the most serious threat to international security. Between them, high oil prices and interest rates threaten to push back the middle-income developing nations (e.g., Brazil, Mexico, South Korea, *et al.*) to where they were before the impressive gains of the fifties and sixties—and for the fourth-world nations (Bangladesh, sub-Saharan Africa, Guyana, *et al.*), the seventies have been crushing. At the same time, as a series of commissions have documented—the Brandt Commission, "Global 2000," and the President's Commission on World Hunger—between an expanding southern market for industrial goods and services and huge trade deficits ($439 billion by 1980), the fate of third-world development is linked irretrievably with our own—at once a capitalist's dream and a banker's nightmare. What the third world has been trying to get the industrialized West to hear since the proposal in 1974 of a New International Economic Order is not simply a beggarly moral appeal, as William Safire and other demeaning stereotypers would have Americans believe, but a claim built on the hard facts of interlocking economic and political self-interest.

That Reagan and other Northern leaders came to the Cancún table at all is not to be minimized. From the outset, the event had been hatched by Mr. Trudeau and Austria's Chancellor Bruno Kreisky as a symbolic inauguration to "raise consciousness" and improve "the political atmosphere" regarding development issues. The sharp differences in viewpoint clearly remain, but it may be something that Reagan did not feel "trapped," as his White House aides had warned and that he had to *face* not only third-world leaders who spoke sense, but the greater willingness on the part of his Western allies to accommodate at least some of the claims of the south to priority attention and a restructuring of international economic agencies. In this area the rifts in the Western alliance are as promising as they are disconcerting.

To be sure, the lack of terms or timetables for negotiating the real differences at Cancún leaves things in a state of

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suspended animation. It's a moment for trade-offs. Reagan, Thatcher, and Schmidt don't like the populist, demagogic atmosphere of the U.N. General Assembly for ticklish and region-specific developmental debate. They've got a point. On the other hand, to move these issues into the arena of the World Bank, I.M.F., or GATT without a greater voting voice for the third world in these forums would be unjust. There is room for reciprocal accommodation here. Especially so if the industrialized north wants new, potentially rich markets in the south. The "no-free-lunch" principle cuts both ways.

There is also room for a host of trade-offs on the issues of trade vs. aid and public vs. private. Mr. Reagan went to Cancún waving the entrepreneurial flag on these questions, enthralled with the achievement of Taiwan and Hong Kong but utterly oblivious, for instance, of what the free-enterprise "miracle" has done to disenfranchise and impoverish millions of peasants in Brazil or the Philippines. People like Zhano Zlyang of China or Siméon Aké of Ivory Coast seem well enough aware of what they must do for themselves—especially when it comes to food self-sufficiency—and not oblivious of the wonders of the Western system; but they're likely to want multinationals bound by as-yet-unformulated U.N. rules—as corporations are bound in the U.S. by rules which they can now ignore, as it were, on the high seas. And obviously, if they're to provide raw materials and commodities to the north, the third world wants a stabilized "fair price" in the exchange.

And finally, of course, there's the argument that without enormously increased concessional aid on the fronts of energy and refinancing loans, the poorest of the poor nations will simply go under—and take our banks with them. The post-World-War-II boom that made Americans rich was in great measure fueled by the trade that came our way from the Marshall Plan "giveaway." Why, asked the late Barbara Ward, can't we see in that precedent a formula for the third world? The answer, revealed by the lacunae in cowboy Reagan's Philadelphia version of the American success story, is that this country has never seen the point of the America Indian potlatch festivals. The cowboy has his virtues; so does the Indian.

Of several minds: *Thomas Powers*

WHAT TO TELL THE KIDS

I GET UNEASY WHEN SOMEONE MENTIONS MY BOOK

"I got you!"
"No you didn't!"
"Yes I did! You're dead!"

That's the way it went in cops and robbers, or cowboys and Indians, or war. I can still remember a lot of the toy guns I had as a kid—a double-barreled cap-firing pirate pistol, a German Luger cast in silvery pot metal and painted black, a big six-shooter with actual cartridges, a tommygun with a drum clip of the sort Chicago gangsters used in the movies. I had toy soldiers, played war with my friends, drew war pictures in school when I should have been studying. In the attic were cartons of old *Life* magazines from the 1940s. I spent hours poring over the World War II pictures on rainy afternoons. One photo particularly sticks in my mind—of a Japanese skull on a tank in the Pacific. The flesh had dried down tight like wrinkled leather and the mouth was open in a scream of anguish. That picture gave me a sort of shivery feeling, but I can't say that it really scared me.

War was very much part of my imaginative life when I was ten or twelve, in the early 1950s. There was a room in the cellar with a moderate stock of canned goods, bottled water, and a sterno stove. That was "in case." I can remember waiting my turn in the barbershop and reading a copy of *Police Gazette* containing two stories of equal fascination—the positive identification of Hitler in Argentina, where he was living as a retired businessman, and the Red Army's timetable for the invasion of Europe. War was exciting and mysterious, like Flying Saucers or the Loch Ness Monster. I remember the day the war in Korea began. It came over the radio. My father was serious, alert, tense, and eager to explain what everything meant. For the next couple of years I read about Korea in comic books. In the summer, in Vermont, I used to go hunting woodchucks with the .22 rifle my grandfather had given me. But my real targets were Chinese soldiers wearing padded uniforms and "Chicoms"—the quilted cotton hats with ear flaps which tied up over the top of the head. They had infiltrated down through Canada to invade the United States. I knew this was ridiculous, but how else was I to get the game going?

I was quite conscious of the Russians as a dangerous horde. I must have heard about the "captive nations" but it didn't register. Their very names—Poland, Rumania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia—had a sinister sound. I thought of those places as being part of Russia. No one ever sat me down in a class, or at home, and explained things to me. I had no idea what this was all about. War seemed part of the natural order of things. Communism was a secret movement of malevolent intent. The other side was waiting its chance. It was only a matter of time before another big war got going.

But for some reason none of this frightened me. We had air raid drills in school but it was a kind of a joke. We lined up and marched out into the corridors, sat down on the floor backs to the wall, and put our heads down between our knees. This seems to be a common memory among people who were children at that time. War was in the air, but I had a child's sense of time. Eons passed between one birthday and another. I be-

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lieved it would all be over by the time I grew up. It was like cancer. "They" would have found a cure by the time I was old enough to get it. Perhaps the fact I played war made me think of it as only a game.

Now things are quite different. War worries me a great deal, I have three daughters of my own, and I wonder what to tell them. One day last summer the oldest, Amanda, asked me what my book was about. I am asked this all the time. It's a form of polite inquiry. People don't mean anything by it. You ask brokers how the market is going, you ask the old how they're feeling, you ask farmers what they think of the sky, and you ask writers what they're working on. I'm working on a book about strategic weapons. How interesting, people say. That's very topical just now. You'd better get it out soon while everybody's still interested. This remark, which has popped spontaneously from more people than you would imagine, used to fill me with despair. It made the job seem hopeless. How can a writer pierce a carapace so thick?

But of course piercing that carapace is precisely the point of the undertaking. I think about this a lot and try out my stratagems on the unwary. If there's time, and we're not just glancing off each other on the street or at a party—in short, when I've got someone in a corner for fifteen or twenty minutes—I can usually scare the living daylights out of them. But what do I tell my daughters, who are four, nine, and eleven? Do I want to scare them? Can fear possibly do them any good? How can children live with a knowledge of the world as it really is when adults find it so difficult? Wouldn't it be better to brush by the question with some short, neutral answer—"it's about the Air Force," say—and let it go?

Words have an extraordinary power with children, especially vivid, concrete words. My youngest daughter likes the story of Little Red Riding Hood. She likes the scary parts, but not if they're too scary. One night I overdid it. When we got to the part about the wolf I lingered on the powerful jaws and the teeth—with the long sharp biters in front, and the big grinders in back. She clapped her hand over my mouth. "Don't, Dad," she said. "You're scaring me! Don't talk about the teeth!"

Adults are practiced in denial but children are defenseless. Once something is vivid in their minds it's right there in the room. My father, who is now eighty-nine, once described to me his earliest memory. He was only two or three at the time. He was living with his grandfather in Owensboro, Kentucky, in a big old Victorian house. Around the yard in front was a picket fence. One day my father was out in the yard with his dog. A man was walking by on the sidewalk. He stopped near my father, took out his pocket knife, opened it, bent down over the picket fence, and in a low deliberate voice stressing each word he said, *"I'm going to cut your ears off!"*

That happened eighty-seven years ago. My father can describe it now as if it were before his eyes, with every detail burningly vivid. I don't *want* to tell my children what nuclear war would do to them. I don't want them dreaming about it. I don't want them burdened with terrifying images which never fade. They need to grow up first, and get some practice in ignoring things they can't do anything about. They need to learn to hear without hearing, as adults do.

Children are quick at getting the point. Once their curiosity has been aroused they are relentless in pursuing the full story. They sense where you're vulnerable. My two elder daughters once cornered me on the subject of Santa Claus. "Tell me the truth," said Amanda. "I'll believe whatever you tell me. Is there a Santa Claus or isn't there?" It's hard to see how she could have framed the question more narrowly.

A couple of years earlier she went through a period of wondering about death. She was four or five at the time. Once, when I was giving her a bath, she suddenly said, "I don't want to have to die." I didn't quite get her drift. I explained that everybody dies, we get to live a long time and have lots of experiences but eventually we get old, dying is something we're strong enough to go through, etc. etc. But she interrupted me. She didn't think I was trying to fudge it. I'd simply missed her point. It wasn't the pain of it which troubled her. "It isn't that, Dad," she said. "I don't mind if I get sick, if it just happens. But I don't want to *have* to die."

When my youngest daughter Cassandra turned four she started wondering about death too. One night, when we were alone in the living room, she asked me if everybody dies. I told her the same thing I'd told her sister, wondering what it is about the age of four. She was lying on her back on the couch, waggling her legs in the air, seeming to pay no attention. But when I finished she moved her legs aside and looked me right in the eye and said, "Do they rose after they die?" I was completely caught off guard. I saw the flower in my mind. This was last April; it must have been talk in Sunday school about Easter which brought on the question. She explained: "Jesus rose so we get to rose, isn't that right, Dad? Everybody gets to rose. Will I rose?" I said this was a hard question to answer. I didn't think so but people in the church *did* think so. "Are we in the church?" I said we're *members* of the church. "But are we *in* the church?"

This is a verbatim transcript. The italics were hers. Children get the point. I have a dread of being pinned down in a similar manner where my book is concerned. That is, where the subject of nuclear weapons is concerned. Specifically, what do these weapons do? Is there any defense against them? Is it going to happen? I can't help what I think but I don't talk about this around the house. Perhaps it's silly. Perhaps they don't really see things any more clearly than I did back in the early 1950s. But when other people bring up this subject when my kids are around, as visitors sometimes do, I grow acutely uneasy. I try to change the subject, or skate over the details. I grow irritable. Don't they notice *kids* are around? Don't they realize that there are some things you just don't tell kids?

IN ISRAEL, in 1975, I met a woman with a child who was terrified of war. I can no longer remember if the child was a boy or a girl. I think it was a boy. In his experience war was something which came in the middle of the night, you

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never knew when. In October, 1973, the child was hustled out of bed to an air raid shelter in the middle of the night. In the morning his father was gone and he was gone a long time. The mother often wept and said the father would be all right, he would be all right. When the boy finally saw his father again, many months later, the father was sitting in a chair on the lawn in front of a military hospital, and there was a blanket over the father's lap. He did not get up. When the mother and the boy left, his father was still sitting on the chair, waving goodbye. Often the boy woke up at night crying. When he was in the car with his mother once he asked, "What will we do if there's a raid? Where will we hide?" He didn't want to go in the car anymore. He put off going to bed at night. He was afraid he might not hear the sirens if he was asleep. He was afraid of the sounds of airplanes. His mother tried to explain everything but explaining was not enough.

This is what troubles me. War is more than kids can handle. Adults have learned to live with things they can do nothing about. Adults tell themselves people will be sensible. Adults bury things and forget they are there, or think about something else, or busy themselves with earning a living, or put their trust in officials who are paid to worry about these matters, or say it will all work out in the end.

But kids get the point anyway. They pick things up. They don't really need to be told. Maybe I got the point too, back in the early 1950s. Maybe it's not worth worrying about, one of those things you can't help. One day last January, when I was trying to write a piece about the world after a nuclear war, I got stumped. Certain details weren't quite clear to me. My daughter Susan was in the room drawing a picture. Without thinking, I asked her what she thought a war would be like. It just popped out. She answered as if she'd been thinking a long time what to say and I wrote it down. She said, "It would probably be very smoky, and not many people, and lots of things ruined, and dark."

All the same, I try not to talk about it. I don't want to be pressed about this.

THOMAS POWERS

Of several minds: *John Garvey*

THINKING IN PACKAGES

COULD OUR OPPONENTS BE LIKE OURSELVES?

THERE IS A grave problem which faces those of us who care about ideas. (Notice how I have gathered us all together in a noble little bunch.) It is something I have been paying attention to in a half-conscious way ever since I first started arguing with people, but it has only recently surfaced in all its silly array, probably because Ronald Reagan was elected president. It has to do not so much with ideas as with the way we relate to them. What I have noticed at long last, after years of doing all the wrong things, is embarrassing. It makes me think that everyone — every anarchist, libertarian, conservative, radical, and socialist — ought to take a vow of emotional poverty where ideas are concerned.

We have an investment in our ideas which has nothing to do with the particular worth of our ideas. Our ideas are like clan totems or old school ties. We tend to think that our ideas make us decent. If we have the right opinion about something, it means that we ourselves must be basically good folks; and the other side of this is that those who do not share our feelings on any particular subject are indecent, even perverse. Our ideas become tokens which we shove across the table at one another during conversations to show who we are. They are signals to people we often don't know very well, which we send through the space between us to let them know what to expect of us, and we are delighted when their response is approving: it means they are our sort. If they bat our tokens back at us with a cool stare or, more politely, through careful disagreement, our first impulse is often to assume that their motive for doing so must be base.

I believe, for example, that the arms race is suicidal and that it is almost certainly bound to end in such destruction as the world has never seen. I am putting this as mildly as I can. I also believe that to accept it as a tactical necessity means assuming something which is morally indefensible: the military use of civilian populations, and the willingness to hold them hostage to possible annihilation. I have noticed that people who disagree with me assume all sorts of things I not only have not said, but which I definitely do not believe. They assume that I believe the Soviet Union to be basically

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trustworthy and decent, not at all bad politically; they assume that I do not object to totalitarianism, and in fact have some sneaky attachment to it, and that I think of America as the world's greatest evil.

The problem is that people on my side of this life and death question do the same sort of thing. Because I agree with them, I tend to forgive them more easily for the moves which, coming from the other side, properly infuriate me. One problem I have always had with *Dr. Strangelove*, much as I enjoyed it, was the sickly consolation it gave to liberals with all of its easy targets. The assumption was that those crazy hawks enjoyed destruction, that they had a romance going with Armageddon. They — our ideological opponents — couldn't honestly believe that unless we met and overtook the Soviets weapons for weapon, we would be faced with a situation in which we might really be forced to accept the domination of a group of people who believe that the Gulag is the proper answer to dissent. They must have a darker reason, something to do with their being anal sorts. They must have had a dreadful relationship with their fathers, or they must have been sexually confused. They couldn't have an honestly different view of the world, a different reading of the same facts.

I disagree with a view of the world which can envision a situation in which our superior strength will force our enemies to back down; we wouldn't be cowed so easily, and it seems naive to suppose that they are that much unlike us. I not only disagree with that view. I think that if it does not kill me off, it will kill my children or grandchildren. Or it may keep them from being killed — at the expense of other people's children and grandchildren. Even if those who defend the arms race as a necessary evil were right in their predictions, I would have to oppose them.

But it is too easy, too self-satisfying, to assume that our own motives in this argument are pure while our opponents are indecent. They are wrong, I think; but to think that they are simply base (or even complicatedly base) involves us in doing several false things. We assume an ulterior motive, which handily keeps us from having to consider seriously the possibility that our opponents could be right. We assume that no other vision of the world could possibly have anything to recommend it, which keeps us from having to examine our own assumptions very closely. And we assume that our having the right idea, which is usually projected at people who already agree with us anyway, ought to gain us support, applause, and moral approval. We do this whether we are on the left or right. And by offering package deals we make it all easier for ourselves. A woman who knew that I opposed the war in Vietnam was shocked to learn that I opposed abortion, because in her package-deal way of thinking a person who opposed war must be in favor of abortion. The left is assumed by its enemies to be predictable, and so is the right. Both sides are right too often. Left and right *are* both pretty predictable, nearly tribal, and ideas and opinions are frequently waved around as signs of respectability within the tribe, as if language had nothing to do with exploring, or with moving towards a truth in a tentative way, or with being doubtful, or with taking a chance at the edge — which means being willing not only to be wrong, because the only thing at stake here is not whether an opinion falls into the true or false column, but also takes into account the possibility that your opponent is a human being as richly complicated and oddly formed as you are.

That does not make your opponent right. One must firmly believe that there are ideas beyond decent debate. Genocide and child molestation are closed issues, I think. It is wrong not to be passionate about the things we care for deeply. I feel as strongly about nuclear war as I do about abortion, and find it difficult to have much sympathy with defenders of capital punishment. If Matthew 25 is right and what is done to the least human being is done to Christ, then capital punishment, abortion, the notion of a war in which whole populations may be destroyed, and the idea that hunger is in some circumstances acceptable, are all under a terrible judgment. But to think of those whose disagreements with us are deep as indecent or base is to put ourselves under the same judgment. An idea must bear fruit; a Christian perception is meant to go out from itself. If we see it as a personal possession we are on the wrong track. As a possession it is something we have to get rid of.

The Quaker saint John Woolman opposed slaveholders and the men who were about to make the Revolutionary War. He thought that their decisions were profoundly wrong, and he let them know that. His life was a lived disagreement — but he always assumed that he was talking to a human being, one loved by God. Even where we believe that there is no room for debate, we must have compassion — which means *suffering with*, which means understanding how a person could arrive at the place where he is — and we must realize that we share the disease of the heart which allows people to wound one another in the name of truth. Erasmus once wrote about one aspect of this universal problem: "There is great obscurity in many matters, and man suffers from this almost congenital disease, that he will not give in once a controversy is started, and after he is warmed up he regards as absolutely true that which he began to sponsor quite casually."

The point is not to become less committed, or to assume that all ideas are of equal merit, but to be as clear as we can about our own motives, and to approach those who disagree with us the way Woolman did. We should not allow ourselves the luxury of thinking that our ideas have anything at all to do with our decency. We should realize that Matthew 25 applies to our judgments: the least of the brethren includes our opponents.

JOHN GARVEY

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NABOKOV TEACHING NABOKOV

A tyrant of art

SAUL MALOFF

TEACHERS teach themselves; teachers, especially but by no means only teachers of literature and the lesser arts, teach themselves; teachers, for better or worse, teach themselves. For what is a poem or novel if not to provide the elucidator with an occasion for disemboweling truths that lie too deep for tears. And now the truth is out for all to know.

But there are selves and selves; teachers of literature on the one hand and on the other Vladimir Nabokov who was, before his darling nymphet Lolita released him from bondage, a teacher for most of two decades. First at Wellesley, then at Cornell, from the time he arrived in this country from Paris, to take up the American phase of his perpetual exile, one brief step ahead of the Nazis (Mme. Nabokov is a Russian Jew, Nabokov's illustrious father was a noble champion of the oppressed Jews of pre-revolutionary Russia and in awful fact his brother Sergei died in a Nazi concentration camp) to the time he returned to Europe for his final sojourn in Switzerland. In art as in life he was an aristocrat, a Russian aristocrat of the old dispensation, a dandy and aesthete, acolyte of the true religion of art, unsullied purist and keeper of the flame. Ideas which never really took root in the American frontier, these, not even in the graduate schools during the salad days of the New Criticism which though Formalist in its aesthetic still bore like a thorn in its side a counteracting native puritanism and pedantry, its handmaiden. The New Criticism distanced itself from aestheticism by what it liked to think of as analytic procedures almost if not quite scientific in rigor and objectivity, and therefore verifiably true.

Nabokov, at the time unknown here though an established novelist in his native language and in 1944 the author of that wonderful little book on his beloved Gogol, brought an outlandish sensibility, an outlander's culture, to the American classroom and lecture-hall, precisely that of the tyrant of art, the unabashed aesthete who made no apologies, disdained all compromise, courted no popularity, brooked no dissent. Art was not useful, it was of no use at all, he told his students in the concluding remarks to his course in the European Novel published last year as *Lectures on Literature* [Harcourt, Brace, $19.95, 416 pp.] (on Austen, Dickens, Flaubert, Joyce, Kafka, Proust, Stevenson). Nabokov had wanted to teach his favorite American writers, Hawthorne and Melville, but the Cornell English Department distinguished itself, as academic principalities are wont to do, by denying permission to this overbearing, condescending émigré who spoke English so very strangely and with a vaudeville accent and now, though he was a member of another department, and did not even hold a doctorate, not even a Russian one, dared to lay claim to our classical novelists.

The great novels they had just "imbibed" would not, he assured his students, "teach you anything you can apply to any obvious problems of life." Art was not only not practical, he went on as if deliberately to assault the most sacred American beliefs and dreadful sense of wickedness, Art was "pure luxury," pure pleasure. Far from being Holy Writ literary masterpieces were "wonderful toys," and literature a "divine game." By way of sending them out into the world he cautioned his charges, as he had done again and again throughout the lectures, never to read books "for the infantile purpose of identifying oneself with the characters, and not for the adolescent purpose of learning to live, and not for the academic purpose of indulging in generalization." Unerringly, he had thus listed the supply-side bookkeeper's redeeming motives for the purposeless idleness of reading mere make-believe, child's play. Nabokov, the sensualist of art, spoke to his creditors of "pure satisfaction" and invited them to experience the "shiver" and "thrill" of the "rarest and ripest fruit of art." Students generally refer to their courses by catalog designation, Victorian Lit, Metaphysical Poets, when they are not being simply churlish and foulmouthed; they called Nabokov's courses "Nabokov."

Pure Nabokov: he was, of course, teaching himself. Even when he was teaching his esteemed and revered Gogol, Tolstoy, Chekov, Flaubert, Proust, Kafka, he was teaching

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Nabokov—his art, his aesthetic, his surprising turns of mind and twice thirteen ways of looking at a blackbird or a butterfly, his passionately held prejudices, scalding hatreds, and fervent loves. While he insisted that "great novels are great fairy tales," that "all fiction is fiction. . . . All art is deception," that he was interested not in "ideas" (for him the terms of abuse reserved for journalists hoping to pass for artists) but solely in "style and structure" as a teacher and as a writer, he espoused his views with an intensity others reserve for, well, ideas, ideas which change lives, animate and deepen, yes, novels, and drive the killing winds of history. "This is style," he exclaims in the midst of some remarks about *Bovary*. "This is art. This is the only thing that really matters in books." In his final examinations, which he graded meticulously, he could ask his students to discuss Flaubert's use of the word "and" and in his lectures he fastidiously recreated a novel's structure, brick by brick, strand by strand, echo by echo.

MASTERPIECES may be wonderful toys but that doesn't mean literature is only a marvelous game: it was for him also a matter of life and death, signifying everything, like chasing butterflies or playing chess. Civilization itself hangs in the balance; the barbarians are at the gates; a false slip of the pen—the wrong word, some clumsy phrasing, coarseness of feeling, a certain vulgarity—and we are doomed. Especially when it comes to the literature of the mother tongue; however deeply he cared about the literature of England, Germany, France (his other place of residence), and he cared fiercely (a foolish or careless lapse in translation from the Russian or French into English drove him mad with rage and contempt), Russian remained for him the language of the soul. He can, he tells his auditors, never forgive that fool Joseph Conrad (only incidentally the other luminous instance, if one set aside the strange case of Samuel Beckett, of a great writer writing greatly in a "foreign" language) for congratulating Constance Garnett on her translation of *Anna Karenina* (*not* Karenina, he sternly points out), which Nabokov regarded as despicably bad, while in the same breath Conrad aspersed the novel itself (regarded by Nabokov as among the principal monuments in the history of the novel, indeed of the human enterprise). Some felicitous, vivid stylistic flourish in Turgenev inspires a Nabokovian response; he calls his students' attention to some masterly passage of landscape description—of self-conscious radiant prose—as Turgenev's "concern with the trouser-crease of his phrase; he crosses his legs with an eye upon the color of his socks." Regarding style, such writers as Tolstoy, Gogol, and above all Chekhov, present subtle problems for the critic; considerations of space here require me to refer the interested reader to Nabokov's finely illuminating, tenderly revealing remarks.* We are so accustomed to the voice and manner of the acerbic autocrat (recall his vituperative dispute with Edmund Wilson), to his "strong opinions" (the title of a volume of his scattered occasional pronouncements on sundry literary matters [McGraw-Hill, $6.95, 352 pp.]), that it is all the more heartwarming to hear him speak lovingly and gratefully to his acknowledged masters.

AND ON THE OTHER HAND there is the case of Dostoevsky. Hatred at first sight, a judgment he never saw reason to reconsider. Knowing Nabokov, one should not have been surprised except perhaps by the implacable finality of this strongest opinion. In theory the formalist and aesthete cannot allow himself to be moved by "extraliterary" considerations (a vexed, vexing, treacherous, perennial question best evaded here—the case of Pound leaps to mind); yet it's wonderful to behold how theory has a way of cracking under the pressure of high emotion. Everything about Dostoevsky annoyed him, and worse. Heaven knows Dostoevsky gave abundant cause: his anti-Semitism, his "reactionary political slavophilism," his "neurotic Christianism," his harlots with hearts of gold, his "pathological idealization of the simple Russian folk," his reprobates "sinning their way to Jesus," his sordid "excursions into sick souls," his hostility to all things Western, secular, humanist, anything which deviated in the smallest measure from his religious and political fixations. But above all Dostoevsky was vulgar (*poshlost*, Russian for vulgar and eighty related terms, is the harshest in Nabokov's rich lexicon of contempt), an indifferent or messy stylist, little more than a "writer of mystery stories" tainted by the worst conventions of the Western novel—Gothic, sentimental—for whom art was not the "elaborate and enchanting game" Nabokov required of true artists. *The Possessed*—hysterical drivel; *The Idiot*—sentimental rubbish; *Crime and Punishment*—bad, bad, bad: little more than trash; for Nabokov, as God is my witness, *The Brothers Karamazov* is "a riotous whodunit." And so much for Dostoevsky. Just as so much for Freud, whom you would think to be, listening to Nabokov, nothing more than an impostor, a charlatan, an astrologer perhaps. Just as alongside Kafka, Mann and Rilke are not merely lesser figures, they are "dwarfs or plaster saints in comparison to him." Even if one concurs in general (as I myself do), surely there are other, gentler ways of establishing Kafka's preeminence. We are talking, after all, about Mann, about Rilke! And when Nabokov has occasion to make remarks about still lesser writers of whatever era or provenance, he turns the air blue. About Sartre, he can hardly bring himself to utter the loathsome name other than to refer to him as a "French journalist." Then, next to *Crime and Punishment*, Abbé Prévost's *Manon Lescaut* is "far better written and therefore far more moving." This is far from being his oddest, most eccentric verdict.

There is a case to be made against Dostoevsky as a novelist, I believe, a strong case (as a man he is the major figure in world literature I'd least have wanted to spend an evening with, since you were good enough to ask); the case against him has been made; whether Nabokov makes it is another matter. But except

* *Lectures on Russian Literature:* By Vladimir Nabokov. Edited by Fredson Bowers. Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, $19.95, 352 pp.

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for a few words in passing this is not the place or time to argue a question that takes us immediately to some of the more intransigent questions of modern aesthetics. To charge Dostoevsky with lurid melodramatics, sentimentality running to bathos, histrionics, portraiture veering on caricature, staginess, Grand Guignol (Nabokov in fact thinks of him as a potentially great playwright who missed his true calling), his borderline madness—to charge him with his excess can, judiciously tempered, be argued as serious criticism; to denounce him for making "excursions into sick souls"—to denounce him in effect for the nature and exigencies of his subjects, characters, situations, motifs—his *givens* as a writer—cannot be so argued. Don't invite him to the salon—he will embarrass you; he is unclean; his linen is grimy. But it is not as a table companion, it is as a novelist, that he clamors for our attention.

Squire Turgenev recoiled from his insufferable contemporary, called him, a trifle indelicately, a "pimple on the nose of Russian literature." For Magistrate Nabokov, literature may have been a "divine game"; but not in hell, Volodya, not in hell, and that's where Dostoevsky suffered, kept his workshop, executed the devil's bidding. Nabokov's very repudiation of "ideas" in a novel *partly* disqualifies him from going all the way down to the heart of such a novel as *The Possessed*, for one example, or (splendid though he is on other aspects of Turgenev's major work) *Fathers and Sons*, for another. Nabokov is never really comfortable in dealing with "general ideas," but like it or not there they are and they require to be dealt with. In their presence, impossible as it sounds, he can even be foolish, as in his olympian dismissal of Freud, Marx, whoever else strikes him as unsavory. Fairness is for lesser critics: Nabokov can even succumb to the evil temptation of mocking Dostoevsky by means of fast-and-loose plot summary—the means by which anything can be undone, from *Genesis* to *Lolita* and *Pale Fire*. That this is clowning, not criticism, low farce, not considered appraisal, seldom gave him pause when he was seized by the throat by one of his strong opinions.

Yet finally, none of this matters. His faults, if they are that, are sources of pleasure for auditor and reader. We *want* him to be perversely Nabokovian; balance and prudence—playing it safe—are the trademarks of pedagogues. How startling and fine it must have been MWF 2-4 to hear Professor Nabokov remark casually, as a virtual aside and perhaps with a stifled yawn, that the Commandant of the Peter and Paul Fortress when this scurvy, scruffy bounder Fyodor Dostoevsky was a prisoner there was, as it happened, General Nabokov, "an ancestor of mine." And how the General's correspondence with the Tsar concerning the convict makes "amusing" reading. You don't often hear that in a lecture-hall. And unless you are so blessedly lucky as to have been there, you are never given the pure luxury, the shiver and thrill, of listening attentively while this original who was without ancestors and without descendants taught you how a novel might be read by demonstrating in painstaking detail how *he* read some of the great ones, while he was teaching Nabokov in the courses students called by that name.

Screen

FOWLES PLAY
A TWICE-TOLD TALE

THE MOVIE *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is, like the novel, a virtuoso performance. It's a feat, a technical *tour de force*, a display of craft — and nothing more. Beyond their respective techniques, what both novel and movie lack is a character, a real and human heroine. All the technique in each of them is just an attempt to cover up this fact. Speaking of his lieutenant's woman, Sarah, John Fowles says cryptically, "I didn't understand her myself"; the only thing he could do with her, he claims, was "make a virtue of [my] own defects." He means that Sarah is an improbable character whom he had to avoid at all costs, so he made the avoiding of her into a strategy, a device that would work in his, and her, favor. He palmed off a complete enigma as a woman of mystery, and the movie does the same.

The novel accomplishes this by telling its Victorian love story set on the Devon coast from a present-day point of view. The advantage Fowles gains is that he can interlard his plot with essays on Victorian life and times. This constant intrusion of the twentieth century lends to the *déclassée* Sarah a moral character she badly needs, having none of her own. The presiding over the story of a modern consciousness imparts an unexpected modernity to Sarah's actions. Her on-again, off-again relationship with the novel's aristocratic hero, Charles, is thus rescued from Victorian dalliance. It becomes instead a precocious assertion of female independence. More than just a daft free-thinker of her own day, Sarah becomes a prototype of the liberated woman of our day. Fowles's currency gives him a way to turn Sarah's opacity, her pure-driven blankness as a character, into intimations of feminism. He imposes on the human wooliness of his late 1860s the values of the late 1960s, when the novel was written.

Fowles's approach works as expertly as one of those multifunctional systems on a spacecraft, the type designed so that the by-product of one function provides the fuel for another. On the one hand, Fowles's expatiations make Sarah seem unmistakably modern; on the other hand, they also make her story seem eminently Victorian. The digressions give Fowles something to hide her behind. They postpone indefinitely the opportunity we seek to know her better, and the one Charles seeks, for that matter. Putting Charles off this way, along with us, is a real stroke of genius on Fowles's part, for Charles has to come to Sarah, in the manner of Victorian love stories, very gradually. First there have to be numerous chance meetings where he gazes at her while her eyes are downcast, after which she looks up at him and *his* eyes are averted, and nothing is said by either of them. Then slowly, subtly, almost imperceptibly, the meetings cease to be chance, etc.

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This kind of thing is nearly impossible for a modern novelist to do well. Such scenes threaten at every turn to become transparent, incredible, corny. (Indeed, they often come perilously close to the same fate in even the best of the Victorian novels.) Fowles's intermittent discourse on Victorianism gives him a way to space out the meetings between Charles and Sarah. He thereby prevents their story from gaining a twentieth-century momentum. Besides permitting him to keep a certain distance from his characters, to hold back from a foolish personal commitment to their romance, the essays let him keep his lovers apart by indulging in endless circumlocutions of his own.

Ever since the novel appeared, filmmakers have been queuing up to adapt it — Richard Lester, Fred Zinnemann, Michael Cacoyannis, Lindsay Anderson — and Fowles has laid down the same law to them all: "her motives should not be explained." Director Karel Reisz and playwright Harold Pinter, who were finally awarded Fowles's plum, saw the wisdom of his ways. Sarah didn't bear too much looking into. If she weren't as obscure in the movie as in the novel, the jig would be up. The veils of romance would fall away and reveal the burlesque underneath. Reisz and Pinter also realized that they needed a cinematic substitute for Fowles's discursiveness, a way to sneak a modern sensibility into the Victorian plot in order to make us take Sarah seriously without getting to know her. The solution the filmmakers have come up with is as clever as Fowles's own. It is a modern sub-plot in which the actor and actress who play the leads in the movie (Meryl Streep and Jeremy Irons) are also having an affair during the shooting of it.

The ingenuity of this is apparent in, among other places, a little two-scene sequence near the film's middle. In the first scene, the stars of the movie, Anna and Mike, are rehearsing the second scene. It's one where Sarah gets her dress caught on brambles while fleeing from an encounter with Charles. Anna can't seem to get into the groove of the scene, which goes very awkwardly in her first run-through. But in the second, she does better, and Reisz's camera dollies in on her slightly to give the rehearsal more emotional oomph. Then suddenly we are plunged into the Victorian story itself, into the midst of the scene that they've been rehearsing, which is now performed at full dramatic power.

The sequence is striking just for its economy. Even after you take all Fowles's discourses out of the novel, there are still enormous batches of plot that any filmmaker would have to dispose of, condense. But you are then faced with the prickly problem of keeping the liaison between Charles and Sarah from occurring too abruptly. Otherwise, the whole Victorian flavor will be lost. The audience won't experience that nineteenth-century sense of time, of a love affair taking its own sweet time, upon which the novel depends completely. This difficulty of elision is neatly overcome by the rehearsals, for seeing the scene run through twice before it's done in earnest is as effective as any three of the novel's far more elaborate encounters between the lovers. The feel of an emotion building over time has been retained, even though the plot has actually been telescoped into a kind of one-two punch.

Like Fowles's technique, Reisz's and Pinter's is multifunctional. The secret to its success is the way that the modern affair between Anna and Mike is made to reinforce, and in some ways stand for, the Victorian romance of Charles and Sarah. Anna's initial awkwardness at that rehearsal becomes an emotional surrogate for Sarah's initial shyness and uncertainty before Charles. The modern story is generally retroactive in this way. Sarah and Charles bask in the glow of Anna's and Mike's credibility as lovers. The two stories are mirror images of each other, as the film acknowledges in two crucial scenes where Streep, first as Sarah, than Anna, gazes into a mirror in order to face a decision.

In Anna's story, which begins in bed with Mike, sex precedes feeling. It's the modern way. In Sarah's story, feeling of course precedes sex. Although the two sets of mores may sound nicely balanced, they're not. Our response to the Victorian story relies upon the modern one. The premise of the adaptation is that the affair between the two film stars is reality, while the Victorian melodrama in which they're cast is, therefore, just a fantasy. Yet by repeatedly dissolving from Mike's and Anna's emotions into Charles's and Sarah's, the movie grafts reality onto the fantasy. I can't understand people who tell me that they love the Victorian romance, but hate the contemporary sub-plot. Anna and Mike's affair is the keystone holding up the whole bridge from novel to movie, preventing Charles and Sarah from falling into the abyss of time as they cross between the two.

Fowles's characters are so arbitrary that he could change the happy ending he originally published to a sad one in subsequent editions. The movie, with its twin stories, tries to have the ending both ways. (Dickens also changed an ending or two, I believe. It's a comparison Fowles hoped I would think of.) In the last analysis, the novel's characters and the film's are equally impenetrable, though sometimes in different ways. At first Fowles makes Charles into a kind of intellectual fop; but then, once Sarah turns to him, we are to believe him worthy of her trust and passion even though he hasn't changed. In the movie he is more like her, an enigma, someone neither ludicrous nor noble, just incomprehensible. Since the movie hasn't time for the muddles of character development that Fowles lavishes on everyone except Sarah, everyone in the movie seems like her. She and Anna are both capricious, inscrutable. There is some gain here, I suppose. The inconsistencies are consistent throughout.

But this doesn't finally compensate us for what's lost from the novel. Fowles *has* written a rather good Victorian novel, actually, but it's not *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. It's *Daniel Martin*, his autobiographical story of a screenwriter gone sour on Hollywood. In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, he ultimately becomes more absorbed with the historical essays. They may have begun as a smokescreeen for the fiction, but in the end he is more interested in them than it, and they are what makes the novel worth reading. Lacking them, the movie becomes a twice-told tale that doesn't make much sense in either version.

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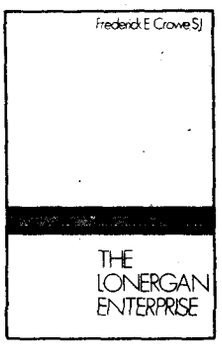

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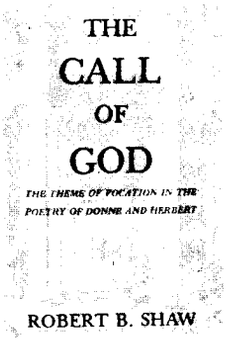

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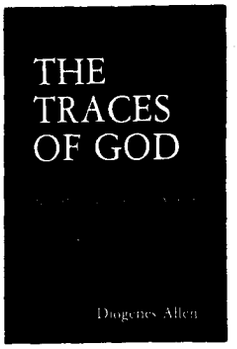

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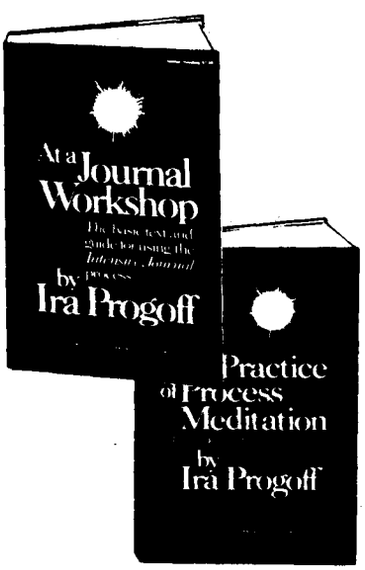

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Books: AT HOME WITH OBSOLESCENCE

RABBIT IS RICH
John Updike
Knopf, $13.95, 467 pp.

Daniel M. Murtaugh

HARRY "Rabbit" Angstrom has always had to deal, in one way or another, with obsolescence. In *Rabbit Run* (1960), the first of what is now a trilogy, he was a young husband and father, selling vegetable slicer-dicers in a department store in Brewer, Pennsylvania, and trying to fend off the realization that his recent past as a high school basketball star was going to remain the high point of his life. In *Rabbit Redux* (1971), he had what looked like steady work, a cracker-box house in a new development, and a set of comfortable prejudices, but the Vietnam war, the sexual revolution, the computer, and a druggy, jivey counterculture sought him out, invaded his home, and nearly shredded his identity. His obsolescence took on a distinctly political dimension. Each novel leaves him dangling over a precipice. Each sequel finds that the intervening ten years have contrived some inglorious rescue. The latest announces his ironic triumph in its title, a triumph conferred upon him by his foxy father-in-law who brought him into his Toyota dealership and then died, leaving him with a showroom full of economy cars in a nation running out of gas.

Money helps. Just how much it helps is, perhaps, the most humorous and unfriendly revelation of middle age. It cushions every fall. As a result, *Rabbit Is Rich* is a more consistently comic novel, looser and easier and more cynical than its predecessors. *Rabbit Run* and *Rabbit Redux* each moved with a sharp clarity of purpose to a truly harrowing catastrophe. Years after closing it, *Rabbit Redux* still seems to me one of the most painful books I have read. In the new book, however, the plot is diffuse, its movements multiple, its catastrophes promised and then mockingly withdrawn. Rabbit is merely baffled, tricked, not drawn on the wheel as he was before. His son Nelson turns up suddenly from Kent State, by way of Colorado, with a girl named Melanie, who turns out to be a baby-sitter keeping an eye on him for his real girl whom he has "knocked up" and whom he forlornly proceeds to marry. Rabbit meanwhile, thinks he has discovered his own illegitimate daughter, but he hasn't. He invests in gold, makes a bundle, then switches to silver just as the Hunts are getting ready to unload it. He lusts after an older friend's younger wife, but in a magical six-handed swap in the sanctioned Caribbean night he winds up with the wrong partner. He reaches for smaller sorts of transcendence in this novel and, missing them, he rolls with his pratfalls. Need I add that he takes up jogging, then lets it drop?

The irony is manifold and humane in this novel. Its special quality has grown steadily from its sources in *Rabbit Run*. Harry Angstrom's weaknesses turn out to be his strengths, and Updike never quite allows us to feel superior to him or to them. His marriage, for example, proves to be remarkably stable. Here again money helps. Part of what holds them together is Harry's and Janice's shared comfortable awareness that without the Toyota dealership that is her dowry, Harry would be nowhere. This theme recurs variously in the novel. Harry and Janice make love in a nest of Krugerrands (the sex, as before, is pitilessly explicit). They struggle together from the commodity dealer to the bank weighed down with seventy-four pounds of silver dollars, and Harry imagines suddenly how they must look to God: like "two ants trying to make it up the sides of a bathroom basin." Or like Sisyphus, perhaps, as Camus saw him, but *sharing* the essential absurdity that they transmute into meaning.

The Krugerrands and cartwheels bring us back to the theme of obsolescence. Here, of course, it is the obsolescence of the dollar that Rabbit has now learned to live with and exploit. And as the Krugerrand is to the dollar, the Toyota is to the Chevy and the Ford. America's manufacturing industries are in ruins, a scar on the landscape of Brewer. But amid these ruins arises Rabbit's new country club, the Flying Eagle, and Rabbit's new class, "a class of the young middle-aged that had arisen in the retail businesses and service industries and software end of the new technology and that did not expect liveried barmen and secluded cardrooms, that did not mind the pre-fab clubhouse and sweep-it-yourself tennis courts of the Flying Eagle; to them the polyester wall-to-wall carpeting of the locker rooms seemed a luxury, and a Coke machine in a cement corridor a friendly sight." Here, in this *arriviste* nobility Rabbit finds himself oddly at home, and Updike crystallizes a moment of our economic and moral history.

The *Rabbit* novels seem now to be a remarkable exercise of the imagination. Updike, formerly of Harvard's *Lampoon* and Hasty Pudding, has set himself the problem of imagining the growth of a man exactly his age and almost exactly his opposite, a man separated from him by a cultural chasm. This is all the more remarkable in a time when so many authors create heroes who seem their (sometimes Siamese) twins. Think, for

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example, of Saul Bellow's Herzog or Charlie Citrine, or all those dreary English professors agonizing over liberated coeds. It seems to me, too, that Updike's imaginative bridge-building has gotten better. I had not the sense in *Rabbit Is Rich* that I had in the earlier novels that Updike's sensibility was obtrusively sharpening Rabbit's perceptions. Updike and Rabbit have come to know each other better and trust each other more over the years since 1960. They are closer now to seeing with the same eyes, and their collaboration gives us a wonderfully sharp vision of America at this moment, or just the day before yesterday. It makes me think of that other wonderfully sharp vision of Dublin that arose from the collaboration of James Joyce and Leopold Bloom.

Is Metz as shrewd as he is bold?

THE EMERGENT CHURCH
THE FUTURE OF CHRISTIANITY IN A POSTBOURGEOIS WORLD
Johann Baptist Metz
Crossroad, $10.95, 127 pp.

James Tunstead Burtchaell

PROFESSOR METZ of Münster has published eight recent addresses: not a scatter of occasional essays, but a series of attempts to expound briefly, before different audiences, the case for a "political theology" that finds more thorough elaboration in his more sustained publications. The *logion* ascribed to the late Mae West, that too much of a good thing is wonderful, may not apply uniformly to theology. Sometimes a savant will give a clearer and more telltale account of his or her teaching when speaking briefly and to the point. These terse doses of Metz are a valuable précis of his current preoccupations.

The bourgeois age, which the author dates from the Reformation and the Enlightenment, is now in its final phase. Religion during that time has been a notably private and individual matter, mostly of worship, between individuals and God. Christians accordingly have held themselves little responsible for enacting the Gospel in the public domain where good and evil are writ large. It is characteristic of bourgeois religion that people "believe" but have no courageous readiness to reach very far from themselves to put their beliefs to effective good use. The church has purveyed a faith so interiorized, so individualized, that it has had only the faintest voice in the counsels and the capitals where decisions of truly massive morality are made.

What to do about this? As Metz anticipates it, the advent of a postbourgeois, postcapitalist age gives the church an opportunity to quit being a tag-along and to stand forth as an initiator. Christians should go political, as a church. They should provoke a massive conversion of hearts and oblige the predominantly rich, northern countries of the earth to accept as their first priority the relief of their impoverished and victimized brethren of the third world. For the church to do this, however, would require a transformation from its present style — paternalistic, authoritarian, conventional — to a populist amalgam of "basic communities" at the local level, pursuing a more unabashedly political agenda than the narrow, parish-type "services church."

Metz is a brave man. Repeatedly throughout these essays he points a blaming finger at the priests and bishops (especially those of West Germany), and at John Paul II himself. The reader is explicitly reminded that one of these speeches provoked a denunciation by the president of the German Bishops' Conference, and the theology of the ensemble led the archbishop of Munich to block Metz's appointment to a chair at the university there. In one sense, Metz is not political at all: he does not fawn upon his own clerical colleagues.

One wonders, though, whether he is as shrewd as he is bold. He takes the Pope to task, for instance, for retreating from the interest of John XXIII and Paul VI in the struggling churches of poor countries.

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The only evidence he offers is John Paul's refusal to lift the celibacy requirement for clergy. One thinks immediately of the withering rebuke delivered to Ferdinando Marcos at a range of about six feet — Canossa in Manila (no complaints then about paternalism); John Paul at Puebla, thundering about justice; at the U.N., growling to the wealthy powers that the poor nations are not their kulaks; stiffening his own Polish brethren; John Paul repeatedly annoying both strong and weak peoples, despising their destruction of the weakest of the weak, the unborn. If there is any alarm the trumpeter of Kraków's horn calls with no sharps or flats, it is for justice among nations. What *might* worry one is that he can stare down an entire synod of bishops as easily as one Asian dictator. But political guts, he has.

One of Metz's essays is an encomium for the presentation to Ernesto Cardenal of a (not-yet-postbourgeois or post-capitalist) peace prize by the German book industry. The Nicaraguan premiat, "poet, priest and revolutionary" now in high office, is praised as unreservedly as his Polish contemporary is chastised. Perhaps there is a difference in their revolutions. John Paul has warned Catholic social activists in various beleaguered parts of the globe that they are not to take up the same weapons as their oppressors. And he has reminded their priests and religious that the abused poor have a special claim on them, a claim to have the gospel put to them. Metz, by contrast, suggests that there are portions of the gospel too demanding for the afflicted. "The Christian is expected to turn the other cheek when he is struck on the right cheek, but he is not allowed to encourage someone else who is struck on the right cheek to turn the other cheek as well." Twenty-five years ago Abbé Pierre noted a characteristic of the bourgeois clergy: they could not bring themselves to read certain pages of the gospel to the comfortable. If now there are other clergy — postbourgeois — who are similarly unnerved before the oppressed, the poor will not have the good news preached to them. What we preach to any we must preach to all.

The *comunidades de base* of the Latin American churches come in for high tribute as a paradigm of grassroots reformation. Their strength, Metz observes, is the work of no great individual reformers, nor political leaders, outstanding theologians, church dignitaries, individual prophets or saints. I think he is unrealistic, however, in his analysis (there is as much talk of "grassroots" here as in a ChemLawn advertisement). All those thousands of neighborhood *comunidades* did not spontaneously begin to speak, each in the tongues of Gutiérrez and Sobrino. Nor did they spring up unbeholden to the bishops of Medellin and to the social teaching of Leo, the Piuses, John, and Paul. Nor did their hearts have no Latin heroes. Every onrush of the Spirit in a populist church will have its summons. It is romantic to imagine that the church be formed except in response to the calls of gifted leaders.

Likewise, it is difficult to see the consistency when, after idealizing a church in which local cells, free of "paternalistic care," come to their independent resolves about society and its conflicts, Metz then argues that since no politician would long survive if he took the claims of the exploited as his platform, it falls to the bishops (because they are politically immune and secure in their office) to take on this task in the political arena. On one page the shepherds are bidden hush; on the next they are asked to holler.

Metz insists that Christian faith must be enacted in the political arena. There are two drawbacks to such a teaching which I wish he had noticed better. First, those who do enter political struggle may not claim any immunity from criticism and opposition simply because their aims are high. Metz, in a moving lament over Auschwitz, recalls the Christian silence in which the Jews there went to their death. That silence, ironically, was due in great part to the fact that Christians *were* active in the political order, and had other interests they preferred to protect. Israel's military and political adventures, Metz thinks, ought to be free from (at least German) criticism, because Israel stands as a last redoubt for a persecuted people. He seems to ignore the fact that Phantom jets, like nuncios, move at a very nontranscendental altitude, whatever be their mission. Any ideal pursued politically must expect to be met and roughed up politically.

A second drawback to politicized Christianity is that faith in Jesus's Father cannot be enacted in the public order. No political program will do justice to justice or to love. No nation will have a conversion of grace.

Possibly this was the pope's point when he banned priests and religious from partisan politics. The church's labors for the public good require two somewhat distinct services. Some must work within the give-and-take of the political order, trying to make the best of it, rescuing the best options available. Others must work outside that order, complaining that the best of all options available still falls short — far short — of what Jesus requires. On the whole these two services work best in different hands and, while neither is better, both are needed. *In re* Father Drinan, while agreeing with the pope on policy I should have applied it differently, leaving Drinan in the Congress and furloughing him from the priesthood (on the most honorable terms). His knack and interests have always led him to the political order, not that of prophecy.

Some must blurt out the Gospel in its raw form. Others must seize what alliances and compromises are pragmatically possible. I do not sense this distinction in Metz's political theology. As for himself, he writes too heavily to be effective on the plaza and too compromisingly to be effective in the pulpit. Since he is a theologian one would expect him to favor the role of preacher over that of politico. Yet when he addresses a socialist party group he is much more complimentary than cautionary, seemingly endorsing a partisan option pretty much as is (as one often must in politics) instead of harrying and haunting it with a Christian vision (as in prophecy).

Metz calls the church to be messianic. It bears remembering that its Lord is a Messiah who spoke and acted and enacted like a prophet. His greatest contribution to the political order was to disabuse his followers of their thought that there was where his kingdom lay.

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> . . . girls without parade
> bend to the shoreline, cup their hands and drink
> But
> A boy throws stones so splashes distort
> The pool; most males do, as if they confuse
> Marking with marring; as if innocent,
> Inept at awe, they smash what they can't use
> Or ignore . . .

That "inept at awe" sets the tone; this is an indictment of a culture rather than of the male. Indeed, she writes of "Boys we raise to thrive under cockpit stress." And she sees—as in "The Differance—Chateau Croissy," the slavish, secretive revenge, souring into sly vindictiveness, of the woman secretly destroying each

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Late at night he never knows you
laugh.

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did not choose to make,
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tuition money, friends, the most
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hatred of power
from chilling into impotence?

But this book cannot be relegated to its formidable perception of the relation between the sexes. Its basic concern is with the human, and the sources of joy and pain. Another trait which sets the book apart from the general is that it is, in the author's phrase, "hope-ridden." She chalks up that rarest success—that of convincing us that her hope, her joy in existence, is not buoyed up by ignorance or insensitivity. She could not be more aware of misery, and even of doom—*"De Religione Humanitatis Vera"* is a terrifying poem. But it is as though she felt joy itself to be unpossessable, to be a communal nourishment which can infuse the very quality of life. Part of the hope springs from the fact that never is she "inept at awe." She realizes, marveling, that there is a miraculous creativity at work, unique, unreproducible. "Nothing real happens twice." And as a poet she sees clearly that "There is no truth that is not usable." Consequently she is not afraid of what she has to say.

All this might have been ineffective if Ponsot were not a poet of great resource and discipline, with enormous respect for skill; for skill in nature, in humans, in the artist. Skill, she says,

works against limits to cancel out
sloppiness, tedium, and some
pain . . .

Sloppiness and tedium can be canceled out; *some* pain can. And she is able to admire the triumphant defeated:

Groggy with joy and grief,
Infirm, analphabet, allowed for,
How was it you held steady
Without franchise, where you
stood
At the last extremity of love?

Taken aback at all of us, she has moments of clear-sighted gloom—

Here is a rational
beast agile at the thumb,
ignorant, concupiscent
and steeped in lethargy . . .

But the overall ambiance of the work is that of an almost mystical hope. In what is perhaps the book's most impressive poem, "The Great Dead, Why Not, May know," Marie Ponsot speculates on death:

. . . Suppose
borne down on, we are birthed
into a universe where love's not
crazy;
and that split out of time is
death into a medium where
love is the element we cry out to
breathe
big love, general as air here
specific as breath.

In a passage too long for quotation, and one too fine to chop, she explores this imagined aspect of death in relation to language, and comes about as close to expressing the essence of poetry as words allow. This book, on every page, testifies to being the accumulated conclusions of a lifetime. Ponsot admits impediments, looks them fully and fairly in the eye, and goes ahead—not unimpeded, but full of her own kind of poetic grace and uninjurious power.

Rynne out the old, Rynne in the new

THE PAPACY TODAY
Francis X. Murphy, CSSR
Macmillan, $13.95, 269 pp.

John Deedy

FRANCIS X. MURPHY'S survey of the last eighty years of the Catholic church from the perspective of the papacy reads with the ease and interest of those old Xavier Rynne *New Yorker* articles, spared the distractions of pages of ads for the affluent. Some of the spit and polish of the *New Yorker* copy desk might be missing from Murphy's book, but the *New Yorker* mark is there, and Murphy has the touch, or magic wand. It is as if he were capable of resurrecting Rynne at the touch of a typewriter key. Would that all writers were so fortunate in evoking role models.

Those who devoured Rynne's Vatican II pieces (which of course became books) will relish Murphy's historically broader look at the world of popes and prelates, starting with Leo XIII and carrying through to John Paul II. The form, again, is familiar, very Rynneese; the details massive; the viewpoint insistently liberal. Not radical, mind you. Murphy would like to see married priests, for instance, but he comes through as no crusader for women's ordination (if that's to be classified as a radical cause). Murphy is liberal in the sense of a per-

> *. . . Despite the continuity claimed for its teachings . . . the church has frequently changed its explanation as well as its attitude in most of its theological and disciplinary beliefs. . . . Rynne's Law maintains that actual change is accomplished by what can best be referred to as "reverse English." . . . With the publication of a papal or hierarchical document that expresses a refusal to budge on the issue, an unwitting acknowledgment has been made of the fact that the turnabout is already in process.*
>
> —Francis X. Murphy
> *The Papacy Today*

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son's having embraced Vatican II and now being anxious to see the church move on more progressively in areas of dogma and discipline.

Which is to say that Murphy's book is no mere narrative of the histories of papacies. Murphy is judgmental throughout, gently so and always fairly. He can be critical of Pius XII for his "absolute phobia against atheistic communism," but he can also admit that without the Pacelli papacy, with all its positive features, the achievement of John XXIII would have been unthinkable. Of Pius XII and the Jews, he says that although *ex post facto* criticism may be aimed at Pius's judgment, he cannot be scored for lack of compassion or failure in courage.

A primary interest of readers will be with the papacy of John Paul II, a papacy too much in its infancy to be definitely analyzed as yet. Like the rest of us, Murphy is hard put to explain the change from John Paul II's indulgence and openness in the first year to severity and conservativeness in the second. Murphy argues that John Paul must exhibit the commonsense of John XXIII and the forbearance of Paul VI if ever he is to regain the momentum of his original witness to the internal and external involvements of the church. Between the lines seems a vague worry about a return to the omniscient, triumphalist attitudes of the Pacelli church.

The book was written before the assassination attempt on John Paul II, so it contains no speculation on how that experience might have scarred the Pope psychologically. Nor does he speculate on where a less robust John Paul II will leave his papacy, and accordingly the church.

In the topics he does handle, the reader could generally not ask for more. Murphy is engaging, enlightened, and often provocative. His is a strong overview of the papacy from 1900-1980, but, much as I hate to say it, it is very much a male clerical overview. This is not to say that Murphy is a male chauvinist. But it is to suggest that even he may unconsciously suffer something of the myopia that has characterized the church's vision from time immemorial on women in the church, and women religious in particular.

As an example, Murphy curiously omits from his summary of John Paul II's 1979 talk in Philadelphia that pope's explicit rejection of women as being eligible for ordination. This was the talk, of course, that set up the historic confrontation a day or two later at the National Shrine in Washington, when Sister Theresa Kane turned to the pope and spoke of sisters as being "second-class citizens of the Kingdom of God," adding that justice demanded the church provide the possibility of "women as persons being included in all ministries of our church." No one has spoken that frankly in public and face-to-face to a pope, since when? Perhaps since the time of Pius VII in the early 1800s. However, the incident is worth but one paragraph in the book with the follow-up observation that the pope "seemed to have anticipated her objection." The conditional verb saves the comment from being objectionable. No one anticipated Sister Kane's remarks, not even the fifty-three sisters who stood throughout the pope's National Shrine talk in protest over the remarks in Philadelphia (though they were widely accused of knowing). They were as much astonished as the rest of us with Sister Kane's frankness. Incidentally, the standing episode is not mentioned either.

None of this is said to demean Murphy's book. The book is engrossing throughout, and not to be faulted so far as substance is concerned. Murphy has written a good book, and the reader will find it fascinating down to its most incidental item of gossip. Murphy, by the way, has barrels of Vatican corn, and he pops the kernels with exquisite generosity: who alienated whom; what American curia official was carried in office *ad nutum* (under the pope's discretion); what Italian cardinal lied to the public, then was confronted by an interviewer's cassette. It's all there, or so it seems.

So knowing and himself so omniscient is Murphy that it is fun to catch him in one small slip. Pius XI's 1937 encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge* was not brought clandestinely to Hitler's Germany by young Monsignor Francis Spellman for

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distribution there, as Murphy tells us twice (p. 54 and p. 101). In 1937, Spellman was serving as auxiliary bishop and a pastor in Boston. However, as a junior aide in the Vatican Secretariat of State, Spellman in 1931 did bring Pius XI's *Non abbiamo bisogno* secretly to Paris, where it was released by Spellman to the world press. Having had one message of protest suppressed by Mussolini, Pius XI was not about to risk suppression of the encyclical in which he defended Catholic Action and excoriated the youth program of the Fascists.

Beyond that minor point, and maybe the women's thing, I would not want to challenge Frank Murphy, Vaticanologist superb, on anything.

T.S. Garp meets Franny and Zooey

THE HOTEL NEW HAMPSHIRE

John Irving

E.P. Dutton, $15.50, 401 pp.

Steven G. Kellman

WHEN *The World According to Garp* (1978) first swam into our ken, it was doing the butterfly—a form of aquatic locomotion whose frenetic strokes yield proportionately little in the way of speed, buoyancy, or grace. The whimsical, enormously successful account of the life and works of T. S. Garp, author of *The World According to Bensenhaver*, apparently provided narrative self-consciousness for the masses, a public for whom Beckett, Borges, and Calvino remain forbidding. Garp insists that: "Autobiographical fiction is the *worst* kind." Yet there is much in the life of this author, born in New Hampshire in 1942, son of an instructor at Exeter, wrestler, student at the University of Vienna, and novelist, that would make not only *Garp*, but *Setting Free the Bears* (1969), *The Water-Method Man* (1972), and *The 158-Pound Marriage* (1974) as well into *romans à clef* were not, as Garp rightly contends, *all* experience just so much fictional clay. *The Hotel New Hampshire* recycles material from John Irving's four previous novels: a New England prep school, an eccentric coach, a malodorous dog, a lovable bear, a circus troupe, Vienna, rape, prostitutes, a woman who inadvertently becomes a celebrity, and a winsomely self-conscious author. If it is true that all writers revise a single book throughout their lives, *The Hotel New Hampshire* is the most definitive version to date of The World According to John Irving.

It is a sentimental and naive world which emerges in this chronicle of the remarkable Berry family as narrated by the third of the five children, forty-year-old John. It is fortunate that the family is so remarkable, as this is a long book, and, throughout the vagaries of space and time, its members have made of mere kinship an exclusive calling. Two of them become historians of the family romance, another reenacts it for television and film, and a fourth becomes the professional agent for the rest. For those nostalgic over the traditional values of a family novel, here is a book about quaint characters whose lives outside the family circle are indeed tangential, in fact nonexistent. Winslow Berry, son of Iowa Bob, the football coach of the Dairy School, dreams of operating a fine hotel, and his children—Frank, Franny, John, Lilly, and Egg—organize their lives around that dream, of "the fabulous space for sympathy that a truly great hotel provides." The hospice they operate first in New Hampshire, then Vienna, then Maine, is always named The Hotel New Hampshire and is conceived, like this earnest novel, as a sanctuary for decency and good will in a gruesome world.

Though *The Hotel New Hampshire* is spun out of such currently fashionable themes as terrorism, rape, homosexuality, incest, suicide, pornography, football, and the Holocaust, it reinforces the truism that culturally as well as politically we are reliving the 1950s. Perhaps John Irving is simply the *nom de plume* which a playful J.D. Salinger has been affixing to manuscripts in his New Hampshire seclusion. The Berry family, which has its own Franny, resembles nothing else in literature so much as the precocious Glass family. And when John Berry walks the nocturnal streets of Vienna alone "crying not just for myself but for them all," he is an avatar of another prep school refugee, Holden Caulfield; powerless to efface all the blemishes in the world, each ends the night hugging his sister.

Stylistically, Irving, like Richard Brautigan and Tom Robbins, suffers from *morbus Vonnegutus*, a pathological aversion to subordinate clauses whose etiology can be traced to an obstinate faith in *sancta simplicitas*. The basic rhetoric unit of *The Hotel New Hampshire* is the one-liner. Phrases like "Everything is a fairy tale," "Screwed down for life," and "Keep passing the open

So we dream on. Thus we invent our lives. We give ourselves a sainted mother, we make our father a hero; and someone's older brother, and someone's older sister—they become our heroes, too. We invent what we love, and what we fear. There is always a brave, lost brother—and a little lost sister, too. We dream on and on: the best hotel, the perfect family, the resort life. And our dreams escape us almost as vividly as we can imagine them.

—John Irving
The Hotel New Hampshire

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windows'' recur so often in the book that they acquire the force of incremental repetition, or of monotony. When a dog waggishly named Sorrow is found drifting in the Atlantic, it almost seems as if the plot has been knocked out of shape by a punch line, as if events have been deployed around the narrator's stoical delight in repeating that ''Sorrow floats.'' So it goes.

John Berry is reflexively defensive about ''damn reviewers, with their dull, plodding cunning'' and ''bad readers'' who ''discover that absolute obscurity was not only publishable but seemingly identified with seriousness.'' His own clear story is a straightforward, engaging testimony to the family creed of ''happy fatalism.'' The plot is carefully punctuated with the most appalling catastrophes, for which even assassination and castration in *Garp* are insufficient inoculation. Through it all, John's flippant but melancholy voice provides us with an island of stability in a sea of schmaltz. It would be churlish to say anything harsh about John, lover of bears and of a Sarah Lawrence dropout named Susie whom he convinces to discard the ursine outfit in which she has been hiding for fear of being too ugly. Even at his most sententious (''. . . taxidermy, like sex, is a very personal subject; the manner in which we impose it on others should be discreet,'' or ''the first of my father's illusions was that bears could survive the life lived by human beings, and the second was that human beings could survive a life led in hotels''), John Berry, like John Irving, is so cheerfully and terminally innocent that it is impossible to find him overbearing.

The Hotel New Hampshire is an animated cartoon. Its onomastics are funky; an Austrian Jewish animal trainer is named Freud, a bear is State o' Maine, and a Viennese prostitute is Fräulein Fehlegeburt (Miscarriage). Despite local variations for Franny's pervasive profanity or Junior Jones's eternal expletive ''man,'' every character quips with an identically naive cynicism. ''It is hard work and great art to make life not so serious,'' declares Irving's blind Freud. An additional insight provided by this exuberant fairy tale is that it is considerably less difficult to make art not so serious.

Searching for Christian realism

CHRISTIAN REALISM AND LIBERATION THEOLOGY
PRACTICAL THEOLOGIES IN CREATIVE CONFLICT

Dennis P. McCann

Orbis, $9.95, 250 pp.

Richard Wightman Fox

IN THE SEVENTIES Reinhold Niebuhr's reputation took a beating. Liberation theologians and other Christians on the left decried his ''Christian realism''—the ''ideology of the Establishment'' Ruben Alves called it. No matter that Christian realism itself had a radical heritage and, as Robert McAfee Brown and a few others pointed out, a continuing radical potential. Christian realism had become so respectable that self-styled Niebuhrians like McGeorge Bundy and Hubert Humphrey had invoked it to defend the hard-nosed, ''realistic'' use of power in Southeast Asia. It was natural for opponents of the war to overreact by consigning Niebuhr and all his works to the dustbin. Ironic too, since Niebuhr himself was appalled by American policy in Vietnam—and publicly appalled by it at an earlier date than some of his voluble radical critics.

Perhaps it's one more sign of the times that Dennis McCann's scholarly treatise (published by the Maryknollers) on the whole defends the Niebuhrian tradition and rejects the central thrust of liberation theology. But McCann has taken pains to stay away from ideological squabbling. He almost apologizes for taking a firm stand. As an academic monograph *Christian Realism and Liberation Theology* strives to distill the essential assumptions of two alternative practical theologies and lay them objectively side by side. At times that approach threatens

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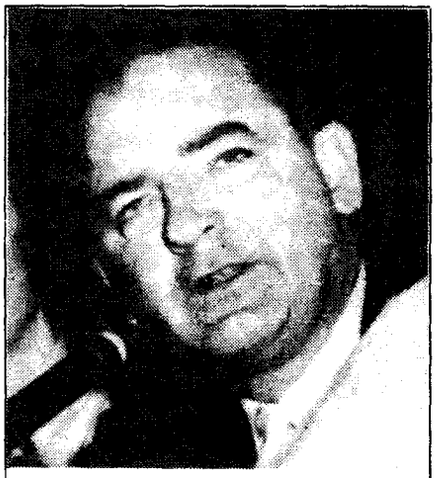

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to reduce each of them to a set of abstractions. But McCann is sensitive enough to the historical context of each tradition that he helps us understand not only their theological adequacy, but also their practical implications.

Christian realism grew out of Reinhold Niebuhr's reflections upon the political radicalism of the early 1930s, in which he played an even more central role than McCann indicates. Twice a candidate for office in New York on the Socialist ticket, and a leading speaker at major Socialist rallies and on New York street-corners, Niebuhr was so militant that many of his friends, and even his brother H. Richard, began to doubt his Christian orthodoxy. But between 1933 and 1935, in what amounted to a period of protracted self-criticism, Niebuhr concluded that his political commitment had been insufficiently informed and tempered by his faith in a transcendent God. Without such an ultimate principle, from the standpoint of which all human endeavor was relativized, politics led first to fanaticism and then to defeatism. Niebuhr was not abandoning radicalism; he remained a democratic socialist for the rest of the decade. But precisely in order to remain a radical in politics Niebuhr undertook a systematic critique of the "illusions"—about both human nature and human history—to which he felt his radical associates habitually succumbed.

Always the preacher of paradox, Niebuhr insisted that Christians master a delicate balancing act: they must be in politics but not of it, committed to establishing justice in social relations, but reconciled to the futility of striving to perfect the world. From the beginning, therefore, the central focus of Christian realism—as McCann astutely shows—was the "disposition" of the individual Christian struggling on the one hand to engage in politics but on the other to refrain from absolutizing his cause. Christian realism developed a profound understanding of human nature in society, while on the whole it neglected the theory of society itself. "For Christian realism," McCann writes, "history is an interim in which the conflict of grace and pride confirms the paradoxical logic of the Cross . . . , a fulfillment of history that lies beyond history itself." For Niebuhr history was ultimately the realm of man's paradoxical encounter with a Hidden God, not the realm of struggling to build God's kingdom.

For liberation theologians like Gustavo Gutierrez, whom McCann treats at greatest length, the starting point is utterly different. They "begin with a religious vision not of a Hidden God, but of One who emphatically stands revealed in the struggles of oppressed peoples." The Exodus is the paradigmatic Biblical story for liberation theology, as the "myths" of Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement are for Christian realism. Salvation is historicized for Gutierrez, identified to a large degree with wordly deliverance History itself is the arena of the fulfillment of God's will.

McCann believes that liberation theology is essentially flawed because it "possesses no theoretical resources for distinguishing religious transcendence from political enthusiasm, a distinction that . . . Christian social activists must make if they are to remain recognizably Christian." The recent development of liberation theology in the work of Jon Sobrino and Juan Luis Segundo further persuades McCann that liberation theology is inherently unstable. It must either abandon its distinctive method of conscientization to salvage a specifically Christian content (as in Sobrino's "conservative" *Christology at the Crossroads*) or follow conscientization to its logical, quasi-secular end point (as in Segundo's "radical" *Liberation of Theology*). For Segundo, thoroughgoing conscientization requires that an elite of Christian leaders—who in his view must manage the masses much more overtly than Gutierrez ever proposed—must be willing to dispense with (in McCann's phrase) "the figure of Jesus as represented in the New Testament."

Jesus's ethic of non-violence, for example, becomes for Segundo a dispensable feature of Jesus's "ideology," one that is in no sense normative for contemporary Christians. Christian ethics for Segundo is the evaluation of ends, not the proscription of any particular means; no means are ruled out a priori in the struggle for liberation. Interestingly, as McCann points out, Niebuhr's position in the 1930s bore a strong resemblance to Segundo's yet there was a pivotal difference. Niebuhr agreed that Jesus's ethic of non-resistance was not immediately "relevant" to the social struggle, but he insisted that as an "impossible possibility" it was still normative for Christians. It was the transcendent ideal that must be constantly invoked to criticize the necessarily imperfect actions of those Christians who, like himself, immersed themselves in politics. Christian ethics for Niebuhr is grounded on the tension between the normative "impossible ideal" and the believer's concrete actions; in Segundo's ethics that tension is lost.

As far as it goes, McCann's discussion of these two conflicting practical theologies is very insightful, although his use of academic jargon will needlessly limit the accessibility of the text. The major problem with the book is that it stops just at the point where we are ready to consider McCann's claim that an updated Christian realism — one characterized by a more sophisticated sense of social theory — is the path of the future in Christian ethics. *Christian Realism and Liberation Theology* never reaches its announced goal of "re-examining Christian realism in the light of liberation theology." McCann in effect gives us the first two-thirds of a ground-breaking volume. To know how much ground he has broken we need to see the other third of the book.

One vital contribution that such a conclusion might have made would be to show how Christian realism might address the realities of contemporary Latin America. Niebuhr himself had very little to say about the non-European world. His 1963 volume *A Democratic Experience*, co-authored with Paul Sigmund, is in fact all Sigmund and no Niebuhr when it addresses Latin America. The question remains whether Niebuhr's tragic Christian vision is compatible with commitment to a disciplined struggle for political liberation in a setting of structural oppression. We are still waiting for a Niebuhrian on the left to take up where Michael Novak left off years ago in his *Theology for Radical Politics*.

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'Art's subject is the human clay'

EARLY AUDEN

Edward Mendelson

Viking, $20, 407 pp.

W. H. AUDEN: A BIOGRAPHY

Humphrey Carpenter

Houghton Mifflin, $15.95, 495 pp.

Jeffrey Meyers

EDWARD MENDELSON convincingly argues that Auden, the first English writer to absorb the lessons of modernism, "became the most inclusive poet of the twentieth century, its most technically skilled, and its most truthful." Auden's witty, ironic, sophisticated poetry—serious in meaning if not in tone—is informed by intellectual scope, dazzling virtuosity, and oral force. last quatrain of "The Fall of Rome," for example, combines precise observation with breadth of vision to suggest an antidote to the horrors of modern urban life:

Altogether elsewhere, vast
Herds of reindeer move across
Miles and miles of golden moss,
Silently and very fast.

"During the first twelve years of his career," Mendelson observes, "the years that are the subject of this book, Auden made the difficult passage from a private poetry to a public one, from apparent formal disorder to manifest artifice, from lonely severity to a community of meaning." His first volume, *Poems*, was privately printed by Stephen Spender at Oxford in 1928, when Wyndham Lewis found him like a rather "fey" oriental ambassador: "He was very crafty and solemn: I felt I was being interviewed by an emissary of some highly civilized power." John Berryman noted that by 1935 "the Auden climate had set in strongly. Poetry became ominous, flat, and social; elliptical and indistinctly allusive; casual in tone and form; frightening in import."

Mendelson is especially good on three dominant influences on Auden during the 1930s: D. H. Lawrence, T. E. Lawrence and W. B. Yeats. Auden's ideas on education, politics, psychology, and religion were influenced by D. H. Lawrence's *Fantasia of the Unconscious* and *Apocalypse*, particularly by his life-affirming Romantic belief that "to act on one's deepest impulses is to be happy and virtuous, immune to neurosis, a living beacon to the tormented and the ill."

Auden based Ransom, the neurotic and self-destroying hero of his play, *The Ascent of F-6*, on T. E. Lawrence, whose life (he felt) was "an allegory of the transformation of the Truly Weak Man into the Truly Strong Man." He compared T. E. Lawrence to the heroic Lenin, and believed he exemplified "most completely what is best and significant in our lives, our nearest approach to a synthesis of feeling and reason, act and thought."

Auden's relation to Yeats, who addressed political issues from a personal perspective, was more problematical. He successfully based the rhetorical splendors of "September 1, 1939" on the meter and form of Yeats's poem on the Irish revolution, "Easter 1916." But Auden found that he contradicted his own beliefs whenever he followed the example of Yeats and attempted to express "the thoughts of a wise man in the speech of the common people." Through no fault of his own Yeats became what Auden called "a symbol of my own devil of unauthenticity." Auden later renounced the falsity of major poems like "September 1, 1939" and *Spain*. But Mendelson, who calls the latter "the record of a [political] disillusionment half accepted, half denied," has rightly restored both poems to the canon in his edition of *The English Auden*.

Auden expressed his artistic credo in *Letter to Lord Byron* and applied it to his urbane and tender homosexual love lyrics:

To me Art's subject is the human
clay,
And landscape but the background
to a torso;

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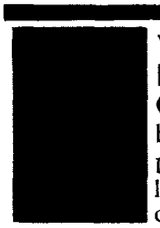

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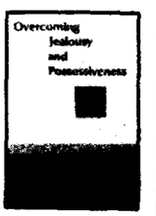

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In 1964 it was known that Auden had been Hammarskjöld's candidate for the Nobel Prize for Literature. But it was made clear to Auden that his remarks about Hammarskjöld in the introduction to Markings *were not acceptable to the Swedish Academy. Auden, however, was adamant. He printed the introduction without changing anything, remarking philosophically and without bitterness: "Well, there goes the Nobel Prize!"*

—Humphrey Carpenter
W. H. Auden

All Cézanne's apples I would give
away
For one small Goya or a Daumier.

Mendelson notes that innovative lyrics like "Lay your sleeping head, my love, / Human on my faithless arm," describe the moral consequences of sexual success and emotional failure in an ambiguous tone of celebration and regret: "It is the first English poem in which a lover proclaims, in moral terms and during a shared night of love, his own faithlessness."

Mendelson's book is not as original as those of his predecessors Monroe Spears (1963) and John Fuller (1970)—he is sound rather than brilliant—and his rather relentless exposition of scores of complex poems makes difficult reading. But, as Auden's literary executor, bibliographer and editor, his interpretations are backed with the authority of personal conversations, manuscripts and unpublished letters that cast new light on Auden's intellect, ideas, and intentions. Mendelson does not give full consideration to Auden's great elegies on Yeats and Freud, who died after he left England for America in January 1939. But his observation that Auden used the example of the dead to teach the living and "praised Freud's charity, his wish to share the gifts of mercy that restore and recover," makes us eager for his second volume on the later poetry.

Carpenter's biography—less lively but much more thorough and accurate than Charles Osborne's life (1980)—is a perfect complement to Mendelson's critical study (each writer thanks the other for his assistance). The main defect in Carpenter is a certain vagueness toward the end of the book when he fails to specify the name of Auden's literary agent, his Italian prize, the reasons for his estrangement from Benjamin Britten, the nature of his friendship with William Walton. He never mentions that Auden was best man at Theodore Roethke's wedding and invited him to his summer house on Ischia. But both books are indispensable for any future study of Auden as a versatile poet, dramatist, librettist, travel writer, critic, translator, and anthologist.

Auden's powerful personality and intellect had an immense influence on his Oxford contemporaries in the mid-1920s, and his didactic gifts led him (as it had led the young D. H. Lawrence, Eliot, Huxley, Waugh and Orwell) to begin his career as a schoolmaster in Scotland. He was an enthusiastic and original teacher, who once threatened to mutilate himself if the boys continued to misbehave and even brought out a knife to horrified cries of "No, sir! Don't do it!"

Sustained for twenty years by "uppers and downers" (benzedrine and seconal), he also taught at many schools and universities in America. Randall Jarrell noted his generosity at Princeton in 1951: "Auden came over to tell me that *Seven-League Crutches* was 'frightfully good.' This seemed awfully kind of him considering what severe things I've said about his later work." But he rightly thought that the standard of education in America was unbelievably low: "No one does any work or learns *anything*. . . . Seeing that they have been at school for twelve years, their ignorance is incredible, and their lack of wish to know anything sad."

His poetry readings were far less successful, for he read woodenly, spoke indistinctly and often stumbled over words. I remember seeing a drunken disaster at Memorial Hall in Cambridge in 1960 when Auden, in a grotesque parody of his noble character, lurched forward on the lectern, pushed off his papers (which fluttered into the audience) and could not continue coherently.

In his lonely later years Auden (a prodigious worker) became compulsive about time, but lived in personal chaos and squalor. He aged suddenly in the mid-1950s, and his corrugated face became etched in wrinkles that looked like the parched desert earth or (as he said) "like a wedding-cake left out in the rain." But his wit was as sharp as ever. Shortly before he returned to live in Oxford, his telephone rang late one night in New York and a rough voice shouted: "We are going to castrate you and then kill you." Auden quickly replied: "I think you have the wrong number."

The mind's descent into the heart

TRUE PRAYER

AN INVITATION TO CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

Kenneth Leech
Harper & Row, $10.95, 202 pp.

PRAYER OF THE HEART

George A. Maloney, S.J.
Ave Maria Press, $3.95, 206 pp.

THE WAY OF THE HEART

DESERT SPIRITUALITY IN CONTEMPORARY MINISTRY

Henri J.M. Nouwen
Seabury, $7.95, 96 pp.

Robert P. Imbelli

ONE OF THE UNHAPPY dichotomies of our recent theological past has been that between theology and spirituality; their divorce often issuing in both arid dogmatism and mushy spirituality. Today, among the welcome signs of vitality in the contemporary church, one must count the effort of many to promote a reconciliation and to recover a theology that nourishes the heart and a spirituality that does not require a suspension of the mind. In the United States Thomas Merton provided pioneering insight and inspiration in this direction, and his influence shows itself clearly in the books

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under review. Each of them seeks a theology and spirituality that honors both heart and head; for each insists, in the words of the Russian mystic appropriated by all three, that prayer itself is "to descend with the mind into the heart."

The most ambitious of the three works, and perhaps the most successful, is Kenneth Leech's study, *True Prayer*. The author of *Soul Friend* is a widely-read and genial guide to the spiritual tradition, and here he issues "an invitation to spirituality" whose focus upon prayer gives the book a concreteness and immediacy to experience which make it appealing and helpful. Leech organizes his reflections around the themes of "Prayer and God," "Prayer and penitence," "Prayer and conflict," and "Prayer and progress." In developing these themes he quotes richly from a range of spiritual writers who witness to the tradition of both the Christian East and West. It strikes me that the book offers an especially sound introduction to spirituality for those who come with little formal background, since the author incorporates into his exposition good basic insights into such topics as eucharist and penance which stand at the center of Christian life in the Spirit.

My own dissatisfactions with the book are, perhaps, the inverse side of its strengths. For one, though the author quotes widely and suggestively, he refrains from giving explicit references; as a result, while the book is not burdened by footnotes, it is also less useful as a resource than it might have been. Secondly, and more seriously, though the matter is organized under the rubric of prayer, what is lacking is a truly systematic perspective. Good things, old and new, tumble out in profusion, and one feasts richly and well; but the gifts lie upon the table juxtaposed rather than integrally related in coherent and compelling fashion. Since perceived weaknesses so often stem from personal requirements, those I've listed might well be deemed recommendations by some; but to my mind they prevent a good book from being a truly excellent one.

Henri Nouwen's latest book (as of this writing) is broadly related to Leech's as practice is to theory. For if theology as

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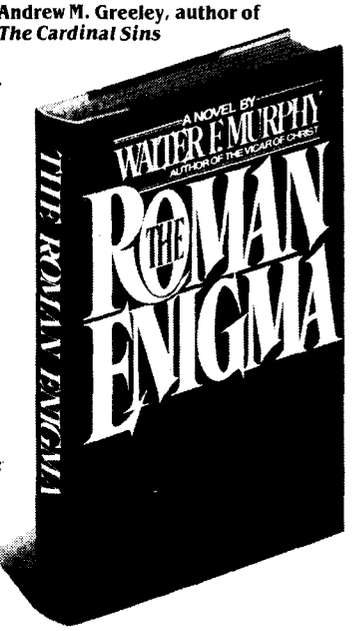

A novel by Walter F. Murphy, author of *The Vicar of Christ*
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theory seeks to map the contours of life in the Spirit, then spirituality, as a more practical skill and discipline, seeks to discern the individual's place on the map, the concrete obstacles and helps he or she encounters on the way. It is in the latter task that Nouwen's penchant and genius reside. *The Way of the Heart,* as its subtitle clearly indicates, is Nouwen's attempt to apply the insights of his long and loving wrestle with the writings of the desert fathers and mothers to the needs and challenges of contemporary ministry. He lingers over the themes of solitude, silence, and prayer, leading the reader, by a combination of concrete anecdote and pointed aphorism, into the spaciousness each signifies. The psychological acumen of the author helps him cut through many of the subterfuges of our compulsive ego; while his own commitment to life in the Spirit and his willingness to apply his insights first of all to himself (as *The Genesee Diary* illustrated so marvelously) relieves the book of the lurking danger of preachment and renders it truly pastoral.

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> *God is involved in humanity, and so prayer is an involvement in humanity. God is social and not isolated, and so prayer is a social, not an isolated, activity. There is a fundamental solidarity about prayer which is central to the Christian understanding. The taking of manhood into God embraces spirituality and politics, the inner and outer worlds, in one process.*
>
> —Kenneth Leech
> *True Prayer*

My sole complaint is that such a slim volume (it runs barely eighty pages of generous-size text) should have appeared in a more modest and moderately priced format. During my own tender years pamphlets were available from various sources which introduced us not too badly and certainly less expensively into the concrete concerns of the spiritual life. Do the exigencies of publishing today prohibit a like enterprise? If so, a quick appearance of this work in *Image* paperback is to be ardently desired.

The final volume under review, George Maloney's *Prayer of the Heart,* likewise appeals to the rich tradition of the desert and attempts to apply its insights to the predicament of modern man and woman. Disappointingly, the promise of the author's undeniable scholarship and experience remains in large measure unrealized. The book is unsystematic and repetitive (indeed it seems somewhat repetitive of Father Maloney's previous work). Its quotes from the classics of spirituality suggest real insight and sensitivity; yet often they are inserted into a commentary that trivializes the insight or reduces the sensitivity to mere exhortation. Of the three books, this one succumbs most readily to the perennial temptation of work of this genre to fall into slogans which aim so fervently at the heart that they bypass the mind.

I have evaluated the foregoing books, among other considerations, on their success in suggesting the integration of theology and spirituality, of theory and practice. which I take to be one of the crucial ecclesial tasks of our day. The great ages of spirituality drew upon the resources of just such an integration for a comprehensive vision and sustained a faithful practice. Put another way, spirituality as practical skill needs to be rooted in a theological anthropology which maps the shape of life in the Spirit in a given historical and cultural context. Now, while each book under review shows some appreciation of this need (and Leech's in particular), none succeeds in fully exposing and developing renewed foundations for spirituality in an anthropology which images man/woman anew.

Perhaps the key index here lies in their respective sensitivity to the political and its bearing upon the mystical. For "to descend with the mind into the heart" today is to bring the concerns of justice

REVIEWERS

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and peace before the Lord and to allow that prayer to issue into a spirituality of action which seeks to further a universal transformation, of society as well as of the individual. This "political" reading of spirituality does not condone a reduction of life in the Spirit to its political dimension. But like Origen and Gregory of Nyssa, Thomas and Bonaventure in different historical contexts, it recognizes that if cultural energies are not baptized, they risk becoming demonic. Spirituality has for too long stayed on the water's edge; the merit of the books here reviewed is that, in varying degrees, they have begun to take the plunge.

Correspondence

(Continued from page 612)

given the choice between more jobs or higher pay, the unions will choose higher pay. This policy inhibits job market expansion and thus is hardest on the economically disadvantaged whom union leaders claim to champion. Imagine how many new jobs would result if automobile workers would accept a more than reasonable $10 per hour instead of the current average of about $15. Why not base hourly rate with a profit-sharing addition so that workers would share the profits of good times, and the company could maintain employment during bad times? The unions, however, prefer to maintain their higher wages come hell or Honda.

2) Those who suffer most from organized labor's ever-increasing demands are non-union workers.

It is the market power of Big Business that enables Big Labor to demand and receive extravagantly high compensation. In fact, Big Business and Big Labor are the opposite sides of the same coin. Big Business merely passes on the cost of high salaries to consumers. Those consumers who are unionized or of the pro-

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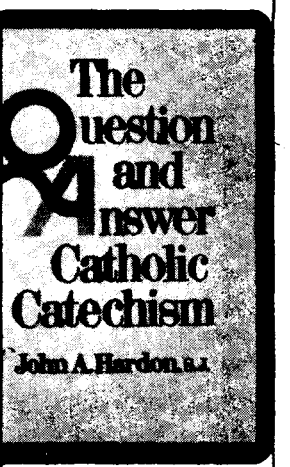

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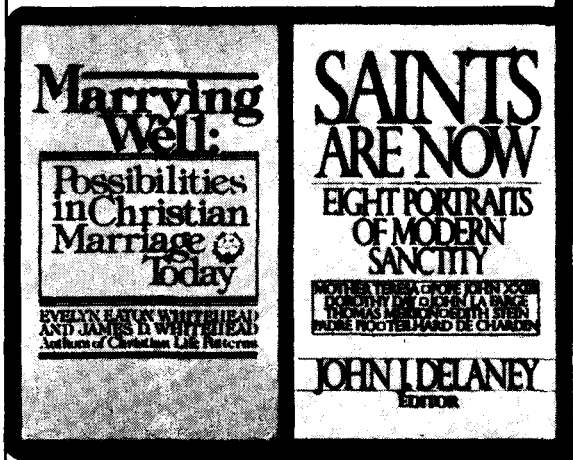

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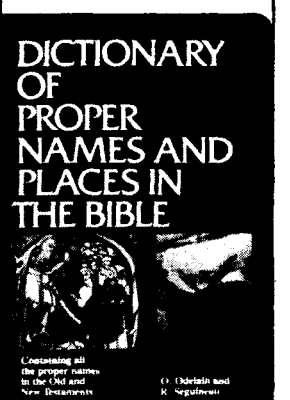

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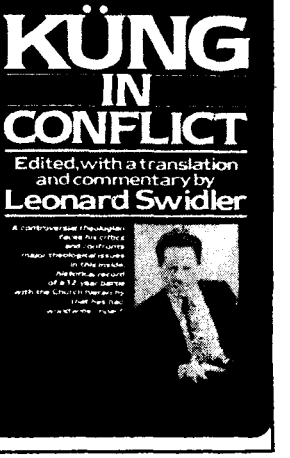

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DOUBLEDAY

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fessional class are able to demand more for themselves in order to keep abreast with higher prices. In fact, since union salary-increases are based on the CPI (an index that overemphasizes the cost of single family housing and financing), many union workers are over-compensated for inflation. Who then is left holding the bag, who is at the end of this elaborate pyramid game? It is the non-union, non-professional worker who lacks the market power to pass on the increased prices. Twenty years ago such a worker could afford a small house and a low-priced new car. Today the price of both is out of reach. Mr. Kirkland's solution? More welfare for the working poor. He neglects to tell us that his own unions are largely responsible for the current economic position of the non-unionized worker.

3) Unions do not wish to organize the vast majority of workers.

The truth of this statement was shown by the weak support the rank and file gave to the 1978 Congressional attempt to simplify the organizing process. Why? Because, what good is it to make $15 an hour if everybody else makes $15 an hour? Imagine the reactions of union workers and leaders to the interest rates that would result if every bank teller received $15 an hour, or to insurance premiums if every secretary were likewise unionized. The unions have their place in the sun and are ready and able to cast down upon those of us who dare question that sacred place the full fury of God, the churches, and *Commonweal*.

4) I am not anti-union.

You will probably doubt the truth of this statement more than the previous three. I do, however, support the efforts of those attempting to unionize J.P. Stevens and the California farmworkers. These groups of workers truly share the economic conditions of first American union workers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The established unions, however, have long since freed themselves of the economic hardships of the past, but persist in portraying themselves as powerless underdogs when in reality the unionized worker is often one of the decreasing minority who can afford single family housing or a new car (or two). It is this discrepancy, between "poor-mouthing" and the comfortable middle-class existence many union workers actually enjoy, that I find distasteful. Perhaps I am simply tired of hearing the televised woes of $45,000-per-year air traffic controllers.

5) Suggestions:

As for the unions, I suggest they go back to their roots and redefine the reasons for their existence. The philosophical foundation of their movement cannot continue to be the pursuit of those ends which provide the greatest economic benefit to current membership without regard for the rest of society. If organized labor is to be vital and progressive, it must open the door of economic power to non-union laborers, secretaries, clerical workers and low-level management. If the unions continue to jealously refuse to share their economic power, then they will die a well-deserved death.

As for *Commonweal*, I suggest the editors apply the same common sense and respect for the facts to labor unions as they have to their perception of the Soviet Union.

In light of the above, should I, a $10,000-per-year bank teller with a wife, one child and another on the way, pay $22 per year for a publication that so strongly supports economic structures that threaten my financial well-being? Please cancel my subscription.

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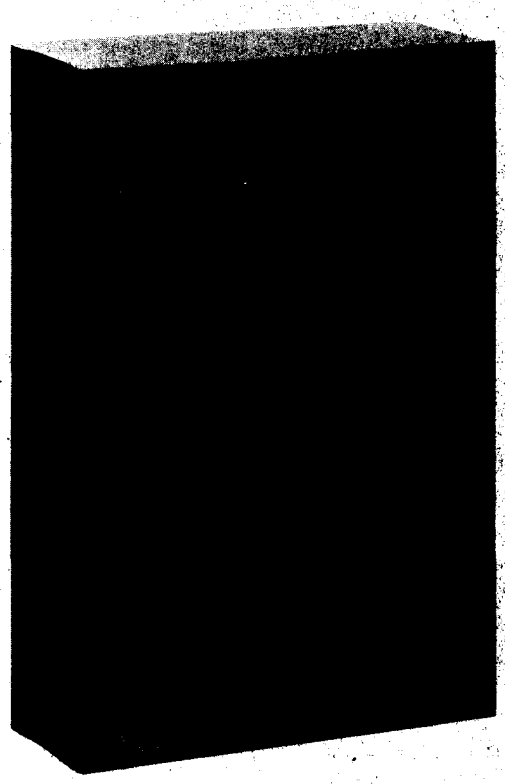

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